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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, November 1, 2011

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, November 1, 2011

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[English]

COMMISSIONER OF LOBBYING

The Speaker: Pursuant to section 10.5 of the Lobbying Act, it is my duty to present to the House four reports on investigations from the Commissioner of Lobbying.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to three petitions.

NATIONAL RENEWABLE ENERGY STRATEGY ACT

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-340, An Act respecting a National Strategy to Encourage the Development of Renewable Energy Sources.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce an act respecting a national strategy to encourage the development of renewable energy sources.

This is a special bill. It is a product of a contest I held in my riding where high school students proposed their ideas for legislation that would make Canada a better place.

This year's winners are Grihalakshmi Soundarapandian and Maria Gladkikh. These two bright and caring young women proposed to move Canada toward a sustainable future by legislating a greater ratio of renewable power sources to non-renewable ones.

Their bill calls on the government to develop a national strategy to ensure that the majority of electricity in Canada comes from renewable sources, such as solar, wind, or biomass. It mandates that 90% of this power come from sustainable sources by 2030. It encourages Canadians to take an active role themselves by installing green energy generators in their homes.

Young Canadians know that a healthy, sustainable, prosperous future depends on moving away from our dependence on carbon-burning energy production. It is time that we follow their lead and develop a national strategy for renewable energy sources.

I thank Lakshmi and Maria for their creativity, energy and commitment to Canada.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

[Translation]

INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matapédia, BQ) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-341, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (tax credit — new graduates working in designated regions).

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to rise in the House to introduce a bill that is important to Quebec and its regions. This bill was previously introduced by my colleague Robert Bouchard, who, unfortunately, is no longer a member of Parliament. Mr. Bouchard had the opportunity to visit every corner of Quebec and to learn about the realities there, realities that also exist in other regions of Canada.

The purpose of my bill is to encourage young people to settle in designated regions—resource regions—primarily to curb the labour shortage in certain regions and to bring young people back to their regions.

In short, the bill would give a tax credit to new graduates who return to their region or who settle in a region. This tax credit would equal 40% of their salary for the first year, up to a maximum of \$8,000. This is strategic, important assistance to recognize the regions' contributions to our dynamic economy, particularly in Quebec. We must understand that some regions in Quebec are short on skilled labour and it is important that we fix that.

This bill is a response to the very compelling situation in Quebec. We hope that it will move through all the stages, as was the case when it made it to the Senate. We hope to have the co-operation of all parties in this House to pass this bill as quickly as possible.

Routine Proceedings

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

[English]

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a motion, seconded by my colleague from Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel.

This is a motion on the atrocities that are happening to the people in Syria under the regime of Bashar al-Assad. I seek unanimous consent for this motion, which reads: That this House condemn the brutal attacks on members of the Syrian movement for democratic change and accountable government by the Bashar al-Assad regime; call on the Bashar al-Assad regime to meet the Arab League 15-day deadline to enact a cease-fire and to begin a dialogue between government officials and opposition representatives; accept the United Nations Human Rights Council's commission of inquiry into the violence in Syria to find out exactly what happened and to put an end to civilian deaths; and, ensure that all the perpetrators of these attacks are brought to justice and bear the full weight of the law.

• (1010)

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to propose the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we do not necessarily object to the content of the motion but we have not seen it before. We have established a protocol among the parties where we would discuss these in advance. For example, the last time the hon. member brought a similar motion, we had the opportunity, through discussion, to beef it up on this side of the House. We would like to have a chance to review the motion. It may come back.

The Speaker: I thank the government House leader for that clarification.

PETITIONS

ASBESTOS

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to say that petitions continue to pour in about an issue that I wrote about in my local newspaper *The Hamilton Mountain News* over three months ago.

Momentum just keeps building on the lead up to tonight's vote on our NDP motion to ban asbestos. There is overwhelming support for a ban on asbestos in all its forms and for a just transition program for asbestos workers and the communities in which they work.

We know that asbestos is the greatest industrial killer that the world has ever known. It is banned for use in our country and yet Canada remains one of the largest producers and exporters of asbestos. It is more than ironic that we are taking asbestos out of the Parliament Buildings because of its deadly nature and yet we continue to export asbestos to other countries in the world.

As the petitioners rightly point out, Canada spends millions of dollars subsidizing the asbestos industry, which the signators refer to as "corporate welfare for corporate serial killers".

It is time Canada started acting with integrity on this issue.

The petitioners call upon the government to stop blocking international health and safety conventions designed to protect workers from asbestos, such as the Rotterdam Convention.

The rules of the House do not allow me to endorse this petition but I will conclude by saying that for the first time I find myself agreeing with former Conservative cabinet minister Chuck Strahl, who is now joining the chorus of Canadians urging the Prime Minister to move on chrysotile asbestos.

VISITOR VISAS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are literally hundreds if not thousands of individuals who have applied to come to Canada through visitor visas. This petition calls upon the government to support the idea of allowing more people to be issued these visas. They are calling the process into question.

When we look at the backlog, especially with regard to parents and grandparents, it would bode well if we could come up with a way to authorize more multi-year and multi-entry visas.

The petitioners call upon the government to move forward on reuniting more families here in Canada by issuing these types of visas.

This petition is well worth the government taking a serious look at.

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Question No. 136 will be answered today.

[Text]

Question No. 136—**Mr. Romeo Saganash:**

With regard to Natural Resources Canada and the oil and gas sector in Canada: (a) what does Natural Resources Canada's economic modelling show about the effect of a carbon price on natural gas consumption in Canada, relative to business as usual; (b) what recent analysis has Natural Resources Canada performed concerning the structure and use of groundwater resources in Canada; (c) what analysis, if any, has Natural Resources Canada performed concerning the effect of natural gas prices on potential shale gas expansion; (d) what analysis has Natural Resources Canada done concerning the cost per tonne of carbon capture and storage for natural gas processing plants; (e) what analysis has Natural Resources Canada done of changes to disclosure rules concerning gas development in other jurisdictions, and what is Natural Resources Canada's position on those proposals; (f) what analysis has Natural Resources Canada done of "pauses" or moratoria on gas development in other jurisdictions, and what is Natural Resources Canada's position on those proposals; and (g) what analysis, if any, has Natural Resources Canada done on the role of switching to natural gas in reaching Canada's 2020 greenhouse gas emission target?

Routine Proceedings

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with regard to (a), Natural Resources Canada, NRCan, has not undertaken economic modelling of the effect of a carbon price on natural gas consumption in Canada.

With regard to (b), NRCan, in its lead role on groundwater, focuses on developing and publicly disseminating information and tools that assist and support water managers in the relevant jurisdictions as they design and implement water management frameworks. The NRCan groundwater program develops novel approaches to characterize aquifers in terms of location, size and dynamics, and collaborates with partners on the assessment of key regional aquifers. These assessments and the underlying methodologies can be used to inform sustainable water policies and practices throughout the country, including in areas of potential interest for shale gas development. NRCan is not, however, directly involved in groundwater projects specifically related to use of groundwater.

For further information, members may visit the program's website at http://ess.nrcan.gc.ca/gm/index_e.php.

Publications are available through GEOSCAN at http://geoscan.ess.nrcan.gc.ca/starweb/geoscan/servlet.starweb?path=geoscan/geoscan_e.web.

With regard to (c), the Oil and Gas Policy and Regulatory Affairs Division's annual working paper, "Canadian Crude Oil, Natural Gas and Petroleum Products: Review of 2009 & Outlook to 2030", found at <http://www.nrcan.gc.ca/eneene/sources/crubra/revrev/index-eng.php>, includes NRCan's most recently published natural gas price and production consensus forecasts.

With regard to (d), analysts at NRCan monitor intelligence and analysis on the state of carbon capture and storage, CCS, costs for natural gas processing. Natural gas processing facilities separate and capture CO₂ from raw natural gas as part of the normal gas processing process, enabling cost-effective high-purity streams of CO₂ to be available for CCS. From a cost perspective, as separation of CO₂ is already part of natural gas processing operations, there are no incremental costs associated with CO₂ capture. Since capture is the largest component of the total CCS cost, additional expenditures associated with CO₂ compression, transport and storage result in much lower overall CCS costs for natural gas processing.

Globally, CCS at natural gas processing has also been identified as a low-cost opportunity. For example, in the International Energy Agency's Technology Roadmaps—Carbon Capture and Storage, costs of CCS at natural gas processing facilities were cited at a range of approximately \$15-\$25 USD/ton CO₂ avoided. In addition, the Global Carbon Capture and Storage Institute recently published costs in the same range, \$19/ton CO₂ avoided, with the explanation that such industrial processes already include a CO₂ separation/capture process in their base operation.

With regard to (e), section 92 of the Constitution Act of 1982 dictates that the provinces have ownership over the natural resources that lie within their boundaries and are responsible for the regulation of resource development. As such, NRCan does not take a formal position on changes to disclosure rules, since they do not fall under the purview of our jurisdiction.

With regard to (f), as noted in the response to question (e), it is the provinces, not NRCan, that have jurisdictional authority over hydrocarbon resources—e.g., natural gas—contained within provincial borders. As a result, NRCan does not take a formal position on "pauses" or moratoria, other than that the department respects the decisions made by the provinces. NRCan's role is to contribute scientific information used in making exploration, resource management and environmental protection decisions by the provinces.

With regard to (g), while NRCan provides expertise and support to Environment Canada on climate change issues related to the oil and gas sector, including natural gas, NRCan has not considered the role of natural gas in reaching the government's greenhouse gas target.

The department has supported internal and external analyses on natural gas in vehicles, natural gas for electricity production in lieu of coal-fired generation in the North America context, and the potential to export natural gas globally.

[English]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if Question No. 123 could be made an order for return, this return would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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[Text]

Question No. 123—**Mr. Don Davies:**

With respect to federal funding for agencies and organizations providing immigrant settlement services: (a) for each of the fiscal years from 2001-2002 to 2011-2012, what was the total amount of federal funding allocated (i) across Canada as a whole, (ii) by province and territory, (iii) by municipality, (iv) by electoral district; (b) for each of the fiscal years from 2001-2002 to 2011-2012, what is the total number of agencies and organizations that applied for federal funding (i) across Canada as a whole, (ii) broken down by province and territory, (iii) broken down by municipality, (iv) broken down by electoral district; (c) for each of the fiscal years from 2001-2002 to 2011-2012, what was the total number of agencies and organizations to which federal funding was allocated (i) across Canada as a whole, (ii) broken down by province and territory, (iii) broken down by municipality, (iv) broken down by electoral district; (d) for each of the fiscal years from 2001-2002 to 2011-2012, what was the total number of agencies and organizations whose applications for federal funding were rejected, (i) across Canada as a whole, (ii) broken down by province and territory, (iii) broken down by municipality, (iv) broken down by electoral district; (e) of those agencies receiving funding per the parameters in (c), what are all agencies that received funding in any fiscal year which was less than the total funding received by that agency in the previous fiscal year, including, for each such agency, (i) the name of the agency, (ii) the provincial, municipal and electoral district location of the agency, (iii) the total amount of funding allocated to the agency in each fiscal year from 2001-2002 to 2011-2012; (f) of those agencies whose applications for funding were rejected per the parameters in (d), what are all agencies that had received funding in a previous fiscal year, including, for each such agency, (i) the name of the agency, (ii) the provincial, municipal and electoral district location of the agency, (iii) the total amount of funding allocated to the agency in each fiscal year from 2001-2002 to 2011-2012; (g) what are the criteria used by the government to evaluate applications for funding by agencies and organizations providing immigrant settlement services; (h) how have the criteria listed in response to (g) changed since 2006; (i) what is the process by which applications for funding are evaluated; and (j) how has the process listed in response to (i) changed since 2006?

(Return tabled)

[English]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY DEBATE

SYRIA

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, maybe now we can find consensus in the House to adopt my motion for a take note debate on what is happening in Syria.

It looks like the Arab Spring, which all of us from all sides of the House looked upon with great anticipation, is turning into an Arab deep freeze in the Middle East. In Syria, the regime of Bashar al-Assad is killing its own people. Tanks are on the streets.

As we did with the question of a take note debate on what is happening in Ukraine and Egypt, I am asking you, Mr. Speaker, to allow us to have an emergency debate on what is happening in Syria. This House could probably move in that direction.

The Speaker: I regret to inform the hon. member that I do not feel that this meets the requirements for an emergency debate at this time.

The hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House Leader.

• (1015)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as my friend opposite knows full well, the motion that he is trying to pass in the House and the idea that he is trying to promote may not necessarily be opposed by any member in the House. However, it has been a custom and a tradition, which he knows full well, that these types of issues are discussed at the House leaders' meetings that are held once every week. I would strongly suggest that he put this forward to his own House leader who can bring it to our House leaders' meeting, which will be held today at 3:15 this afternoon, at which time we can discuss it. We may in fact find some commonality between all parties on this, but that is the proper procedure to follow.

The Speaker: We are under applications for emergency debates and the member has informed the Chair of his request to raise it, which is why we are dealing with it now. However, I am sure he will take up the parliamentary secretary's offer to discuss this for, perhaps, a take note debate.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

ENDING THE LONG-GUN REGISTRY ACT

The House resumed from October 28 consideration of the motion that Bill C-19, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House to speak to the government legislation to end the gun registry.

This could be a serious policy matter for legislators to address were it not for the politics of the Conservative government and the mess made with the registry by the previous Liberal government. We could have a discussion on community safety; we could listen to our police; we could pay attention to the concerns and situations of all Canadians, including our rural communities and aboriginal people, but we have not.

The government is now bent not only on ending the registry but on returning this country to a place worse than when the registry was introduced. The government is bent on the destruction of the data collected for the registry that the police and the provinces want kept. The government that screams about the money wasted on the registry by the previous Liberal government is prepared to spend billions on a bonfire to destroy the records.

This law and order government will not listen to the police. The government that talks about respecting provincial rights and provincial jurisdiction will not listen to the provinces who want to keep the data.

All of this is because of an ideology that has nothing to do with community safety or the rights of our citizens.

Let us be clear about the legislation and all it does beyond ending the gun registry.

The legislation eliminates the requirement to register non-restricted firearms and destroys existing records of the long gun registry.

As a registration certificate will no longer be required to possess a non-restricted firearm, certain offences in the Firearms Act are being amended or repealed. The Criminal Code is also being amended so that the failure to hold a registration certificate for a non-restricted firearm does not give rise to any of the offences relating to unauthorized possession of a firearm and does not allow police to seize firearms.

Previous versions of the government's bill to dismantle the registry had a requirement for people to check that the person to whom they were selling or giving a long gun was a licensed firearm owner. Earlier versions also allowed for businesses to keep records of the sale of long guns as was the practice prior to the registry. The bill contains neither provision.

As New Democrats, we have made it clear that there is a better way to proceed. We can have good gun control laws and also address the problems of the registry.

In 2010 the NDP put forward a number of suggestions to address problems with the registry while maintaining its value as a public safety tool. The proposals included: decriminalizing first time non-registration of long guns, making a one-time offence a non-criminal ticket; enshrine in legislation that gun owners will never be charged for registration; prevent the release of identifying information about gun owners, except to protect public safety by court order or by law; and, create a legal guarantee for aboriginal treaty rights.

For the Conservative Party, which is now the government, the long gun registry has been all about politics and fundraising. For five years as government it never introduced government legislation to do away with the registry it hated. Instead, it used its opposition to the registry to raise funds for the party.

Despite campaigning to abolish the registration of long guns in the 2006 general election, the Conservative government never actually brought a bill before the House of Commons for a vote. Instead, it preferred to simply fan the flames of division between urban and rural Canadians.

As a resident of northern Ontario, I know of the significant criticisms from rural and aboriginal Canadians for the registry. Under the Liberal government's management, the implementation of the long gun registry was marred by long delays, fees for registration and significant cost overruns. It was not properly introduced or managed.

• (1020)

Our party's former leader, Jack Layton, understood the north and those concerns. In August 2010, building consensus across the country in cities in rural Canada, he said:

Stopping gun violence has been a priority for rural and urban Canadians. There's no good reason why we shouldn't be able to sit down with good will and open minds. There's no good reason why we shouldn't be able to build solutions that bring us together. But that sense of shared purpose has been the silent victim of the gun registry debate.

[The Prime Minister] has been no help at all. Instead of driving for solutions, he has used this issue to drive wedges between Canadians.... [The Conservatives] are stoking resentments as a fundraising tool to fill their election war chest. [The Prime

Government Orders

Minister] is pitting Canadian region against Canadian region with his "all or nothing show-down". This is un-Canadian.

This kind of divisiveness, pitting one group against another is the poisonous politics of the United States. Not the nation-building politics of Canada.

No matter our views on the registry, the government needs to get its head out of the sand and recognize some facts. We know how many times the registry is used. As of September 30, 2011, the Canadian firearms registry is accessed 17,402 times per day. We know there is value related to this registry that must be retained.

While there are significant cost overruns in the initial phase of registry set-up, as highlighted by the Auditor General's 2006 report which revealed that the cost of the Canadian firearms program had hit \$946 million by 2005, by 2010 the cost of the registry was stabilized at about \$4 million.

Some provinces want to keep the registry data and some do not. Let us allow each province to decide for itself. If Quebec wants the registry data, it should be Quebec's right to keep it. If Saskatchewan does not, Saskatchewan should be making that decision, not Ottawa. Yet the Conservative government that loves to preach about letting provinces decide now wants Ottawa to dictate that decision. What a strange day for a party that was born of Reform and Canadian Alliance parents who hated Ottawa doing just what the Conservatives are now doing to the provinces and regions.

I have received well over 600 emails over the last couple of days about the gun registry. I will quote from an email that I received from Michael:

[This government] has no right to destroy the Long Gun Registry. This information has been bought and paid for by Canadian Taxpayer[s].

Destroying it would be disrespectful to Canadian the Tax Payer, not that respecting the Canadian Tax Payer matters much to [this] government.

Barbara wrote in an email:

I hope all NDP members fight 2 save Registry Data. Data was collected by provinces and does not belong to the Federal Government. Take it to the Courts if needed; 60% of Canadians stand with you!

I received an email from Richard who wrote:

I agree that the long gun registry needs to be fixed but not abolished. There are people in the community that are informed and like gun laws.

• (1025)

[Translation]

Here is another email, this one from Jacques. He says:

The government has done three things that I am uncomfortable with:

1. Abolishing the gun registry even though police officers are asking that it be maintained. How can they justify allowing the free circulation of firearms?

I will not list the other two points that make this man uncomfortable since they have nothing to do with the gun registry.

As I said earlier, I have received hundreds and hundreds of emails, and I would like the government to reconsider keeping the gun registry data.

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[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member made reference to the costs of implementing the gun registry. I thought maybe he would take some shots at the Liberal Party.

My concern is that many outside professional groups have seen the value of the gun registry. We like to believe that governments make decisions based on information and facts and that it applies some common sense.

I can assure the member that typically this is what we have done as a party. We look to the member to provide some comment as to the direction in which he would be taking us if the NDP were in government. Would the NDP commit to reinstate the gun registry?

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Madam Speaker, the fact of the matter is we are not in government; we are in opposition.

What the government is going to do in the short term is get rid of the data that has been collected for the gun registry for the last 15 to 20 years. Some provinces want this data and some provinces do not. The government should allow the provinces to decide for themselves what to do with this data.

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Madam Speaker, I know the member opposite is passionate about the issue, but much of his information is very misleading. I cannot see how it is going to cost the federal government \$2 billion to destroy the records.

Also, those records actually belong to the federal government and not to the provinces. This was federal government legislation and therefore belongs to the federal government. The Privacy Act says that the federal government cannot pass that information on.

Does the hon. member understand that particular aspect of this matter?

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Madam Speaker, I never said that destroying this data was going to cost a billion dollars.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. member for Nickel Belt about recent press coverage which suggests that the long gun registry was protecting us from more than the legal long guns used by hunters and by first nations, but also applied to such things as the semi-automatic self-loading Ruger Mini-14 and the Steyr Mannlicher HS50, a .50 calibre sniper rifle that can pierce armour.

These are weapons that have been used in the commission of crimes, such as the Norwegian bloodbath which occurred in the summer. I am wondering if the hon. member can speak to the increased risk to public safety from these weapons becoming delisted.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Madam Speaker, there is a great risk to all Canadians if this gun registry is disbanded.

While I have the time, I want to read from another email that I received. Jason wrote:

I am writing you this letter in regards to vote to continue debate over [the long gun registry]. I am asking that you vote to continue the debate, and give yourself more time to hear the comments from your constituents.

I consulted with my constituents in all parts of my riding. The member for Portage—Lisgar was in my riding, in a hotbed of

hunters in Cache Bay for a meeting on the long gun registry. Eighteen people showed up. This is a gun registry hotbed. Seven people were for the gun registry, two were my people, and that leaves 11 people.

What happened after this debate is that my polling numbers went up. The member came back a second time to my riding, to Sudbury, for the same thing. Again, my polling numbers went up. At the end of the day I beat my nearest opponent, the Conservative candidate, by 50%. I am very proud of the fact that I voted to keep the gun registry.

• (1030)

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before I begin, I would like to take the opportunity to thank the members for Portage—Lisgar and Yorkton—Melville for their work on this important issue. Their efforts have helped ensure that the government could bring forward Bill C-19 and finally rid Canadians of the failed and ineffective long gun registry.

As a retired member of the RCMP, I would like to relate what I saw as someone who was on the street for 20 years. Before I do that, I would like to speak to the amount of money that has been wasted on this registry and provide a different view on what that money could have been spent on. We know that when the long gun registry was introduced, the previous Liberal government indicated that it would only cost about \$2 million. Yet, we hear that number is as high as \$2 billion to date. If that money had been invested in crime prevention programs, such as youth or women at risk programs, they would not only have assisted police in their day-to-day investigations but provided opportunities for those in high risk environments.

This is also money that could have been spent on better investigational tools for the RCMP to investigate complex cases. It could have gone toward surveillance equipment, more police vehicles, a number of things to deal with day-to-day operations or more front line police officers. One thing that I have heard from the opposition is that there is not enough money for new police officers on the ground. In fact, the cost for a member in the RCMP is approximately \$130,000 a year. That includes wages and equipment.

That would have equated to a total of 1,538 new members on the road since this gun registry was enacted if we base it on \$2 billion. That in itself would have benefited all Canadians. Instead, the previous Liberal government persisted in building and maintaining a gun registry which did nothing to prevent crime and was not a viable tool for law enforcement.

I would now like to speak to my experience as a police officer. We have heard a great deal from the opposition about what a useful tool the long gun registry is for law enforcement. My own experiences do not support that. The point I want to emphasize the most is that whenever I investigated murders, domestic disputes, robberies, break and enters or any other crime, I always assumed there was a firearm involved. It is simply better to be safe than sorry. Gun instincts will serve police officers much better than relying on computer entry data. I want to provide a couple of examples of that.

When police officers approach vehicles during routine stops, they will have done the computer checks to determine who the vehicle belongs to, et cetera, but what they do not know is if there are firearms in the vehicles. Therefore, when officers approach vehicles, they will approach close to and behind the driver's side door, making sure the driver of the vehicle has to look back at them. If police officers walk straight to the door, they leave themselves very vulnerable. That is why police officers will always make the driver look back at them.

Another example is when police officers approach residences. They will always stand to the side of the door before knocking. Why? Because if a bullet is coming through the door, it will not hit them. That is just common sense.

Drug investigations are a different breed altogether. Having been involved in drug investigations for three years, more often than not when we found firearms, they were stolen and not registered. For the most part, criminals do not register their guns and I will explain why. It is due to the fact that when and if criminals apply for firearms licences, they are refused. That is because gun owners must undergo a rigorous police background check as part of the licensing system. Criminals work outside the system, just as they work outside the law.

I would also like to talk about a major flaw in the long gun registry that no one talks about. In fact, I have not heard it once in the debate from either side. In my experience, the system itself is completely unorganized.

• (1035)

Say, for example, that someone owns a long gun which is produced without a serial number, such as a Cooney .22 and there are many others. The process would be to register the firearm and then the sticker would be mailed, which would be attached to the long gun as the serial number. Sometimes, the owner would receive two stickers with two different serial numbers. This happens a lot. Members can imagine the confusion that this creates and also the lack of confidence it brings in the efficiency of the long gun registry. That is why, in my experience, it is simply not a viable tool to prevent crime or help law enforcement.

One of the most compelling things that this government is doing to fight crime in this country is the introduction of Bill C-10, safe streets and communities act. That is what I am hearing from police officers in my riding and across the country. The safe streets and communities act would deliver greater accountability for offenders, better justice for victims of terrorism, and would eliminate house arrest for serious crimes. It would eliminate pardons for serious criminals and sex offenders. It would strengthen penalties for drug crimes, especially for those that target kids, and it would provide better protection for children against sexual predators.

This is real tangible action that would give those on the front line the confidence that we as politicians are doing our job. It demonstrates that we as a government are working to give police the tools they need to get their jobs done. That was a commitment we made during the last election and it is a commitment we are delivering on.

Another commitment our government very clearly made was to scrap the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry. It is something

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that Canadians across the country have spoken out against. It is something we received a clear mandate to do on May 2 and it is something we fully intend to deliver on.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Madam Speaker, New Democrats have been saying for many years that we need to find a way to address the problems with the registry, while further strengthening gun controls. Our position is clear. We want to see the legitimate concerns of rural and aboriginal Canadians addressed, while ensuring that police have the tools they need to keep our streets safe.

I was listening to my colleague and he talked about how much we need more police officers on the street. I should remind him, and he can comment on this, why the Conservative government backtracked on its pledge to add 2,500 police officers on Canadian streets. Here we have a colleague who is saying that we need more police officers on the street but his government does not even believe in doing that. There are police officers across Canada who are saying that the gun registry is the proper tool to enable them to continue doing their job. Maybe he would like to comment on why the government, when it had the funding to do so, backtracked on providing 2,500 police officers. That was the Conservatives' promise.

• (1040)

Mr. David Wilks: Madam Speaker, the Conservative government has fulfilled this promise to provide more police officers across Canada and, if we had possessed an extra \$2 billion, as a result of this gun registry, we could have done a lot more.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the Government of Quebec has given a very clear indication that it would like to have some form of a registry and it is looking to Ottawa to support its initiative. The government in Ottawa, on the other hand, says it would rather press the delete button than surrender any sort of information to the Province of Quebec. As a result, that means that if the Province of Quebec is going to move forward, it is going to have to spend millions of dollars in order to recreate something on which the government is choosing to hit the delete button because it does not want to share the information with Quebec.

Would the member not agree that, by sharing the information with Quebec, the citizens of Quebec would benefit if the government was moving ahead because now the government would have extra money to invest in community policing, outreach and so forth? That is common sense. Would the member not agree with common sense?

Mr. David Wilks: Madam Speaker, yes, I completely agree in common sense. However having said that, each province has its own prerogative as to whether it wants to open up its own registry. The information collected by the gun registry is under federal jurisdiction and I would encourage any province that wants to open it to go ahead.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for his great service to the people of Canada. In my area I am privileged to work with the regional police services which offer a great service.

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One of the misconceptions, which my colleague commented briefly on, is that police officers use the registry thousands and thousands of times a day or even an hour. We know that when they access those records, it is not always to check whether or not a gun is present.

The other comment the member made is that any police officer in any police service across the country would not assume simply because there is no gun registered that there may not actually be one there. I wonder if he could reiterate that and perhaps expand on his experience, and the fact that one always has to assume that there could be a firearm present in a scene where the police have been called to act.

Mr. David Wilks: Madam Speaker, with regard to police officers who are attuned to ensure that their safety comes first, the best example that I can provide to hon. members is when a police officer approaches a vehicle. This is probably the toughest time for police officers because they utilize CPIC or NCIC which are the two databanks available to them. When they query CPIC, it automatically goes to the long gun registry. It is an automatic hit. It automatically happens. It is not necessarily that I have to personally do it. It is unbeknownst to me that it is going there. It checks against the driver and only the driver, not any passengers in the vehicle. If the driver of that vehicle is not the registered owner that becomes problematic. I believe it always comes down to a police officer's gut feeling.

[Translation]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am proud to rise in the House today on my own behalf, on behalf of Quebecers and on behalf of my constituents in Alfred-Pellan in particular, to speak about government Bill C-19.

Today, I would like to begin by speaking about the gun registry from my heart and from personal experience.

I come from a Quebec family of hunters who have been hunting for many generations. And for the past two generations, there have been female hunters in my family as well. My older cousin was the first female hunter in the family, and I was the first on my father's side. I am proud of that. I began about four years ago, when my father decided to introduce me to hunting. There is an introductory program for new hunters who use rifles. This program allows anyone who has never had a hunting licence to get one and go hunting with an experienced hunter, who will show the new person the basics. This licence allows the holder to participate in any kind of hunting throughout the year. I began with deer hunting four years ago and fell in love with it. I loved being in the woods, walking, being there in the fall, feeling the wind and seeing how hunting works. I loved the experience.

The following year, I decided to take classes in order to get my hunting certificate. So that is what I did and now I have had my hunting certificate for two years. When my father explained to me how it all worked, he felt like a real mentor. He taught me with the help of my cousins, my uncles and that one female cousin. He taught me that safety is very important, that a firearm could not only hurt someone, but could even kill someone automatically, and that one must be very careful. He also told me how much he valued the

firearms registry and how important it is. And he explained how easy it is to register a firearm in Canada.

In my family we are hunters and we all must register our firearms. We have to go through quite a process to prove that they are legal. It does take several weeks to register one's firearms, but that does not bother us. We do so quite willingly.

I am lucky to have been born and raised, and to still live, in the riding of Alfred-Pellan. Above all, I am lucky to represent the people of that community. Alfred-Pellan is a rather unique riding. It is located on Laval Island. Some 80% of its surface area is agricultural land, where there is nothing but fields and farmers working the land. However, the rest of the area is densely populated, with many young families moving there. There are lots of apartment buildings, some low-income housing and many condos. Two different worlds can be found there: one urban and one rural. It is rather unique. We are also fortunate to be very close to Montreal Island. We are lucky to have the best of both worlds.

When I learned that we were going to be debating Bill C-19, I went to speak with the people of Alfred-Pellan to hear what they think. I live in the part that is mainly agricultural. I know many of my neighbours, for I used to play in their fields when I was growing up. They were the first ones to come and see me when the discussions began. They told me that they were very conscious of just how important it is to keep the firearms registry. They are hunters and farmers themselves, and yet they want to keep it.

The people who live in the more urban area of my riding said the same thing. The people living in Alfred-Pellan are almost unanimous: they say it is critical to keep the firearms registry. Unfortunately, Bill C-19, which was introduced by the government, will eliminate the federal firearms registry.

What we are asking, and we are not the only ones, is that the data from the firearms registry be kept. Last week, the Quebec National Assembly voted unanimously to demand that the data be kept so that Quebec can create its own firearms registry.

•(1045)

It makes complete sense. As the Conservative member just said, if the provinces want to create their own firearms registry, they should go ahead and do it. Thus, the government is acting in extremely bad faith when it says that it plans to destroy the registry data, which cost \$2 billion, that it is going to destroy all the data, and that the provinces will just have to make do. It will cost millions of dollars to recover all that data and it will be an extremely long process. I find it very sad to think that we cannot work as a team, all together, so that the provinces that want to keep the firearms registry are able to do so and those that do not want to keep it do not have to.

I live in a riding that includes both rural and urban areas. I am there every day. I am very close by. I also find it sad that the Conservatives are seeking to separate these two worlds. They are trying to divide Canadians on this issue. I find it very sad.

The NDP is trying to respond to the concerns of aboriginal and rural communities. At the same time, we also want to ensure that the police have the tools they need to keep our communities safe. The members opposite talk a lot about their bill, which seeks to make our streets and communities safe, but they also need to listen to what we have to say on the subject.

This bill was previously introduced in 2010 by a member, not by the government. At that time, we proposed a certain number of ways to resolve the various problems with the registry, since we are indeed aware that the registry is not perfect. However, rather than destroying all the data and destroying the registry, it is more important to improve it. So much money has been invested in the registry that the least we can do is try to improve it.

I will mention some suggestions made at the time. It was suggested that failing to register a gun be decriminalized for a first offence and that the person involved be fined instead. This would be a good way to decriminalize the registration of firearms. We could write into the law that long gun owners would not have to absorb the registration costs. It was also suggested that information about gun owners not be divulged, except when required to protect the public or when ordered by a court or the act. There was also the creation of a legal guarantee to protect aboriginal treaty rights. Members did suggest these different things.

I would also like to talk a little about the province of Quebec. Quebecers unanimously declared that they want to keep the gun registry data. The politicians and the people want the registry and it is a tool that the police use every day. I know a number of police officers in my riding who have told me that they never enter a house without consulting the gun registry. Who knows how many times this has helped them before they have gone inside. It is very important for the safety of the police and the public.

What I have mainly been hearing from my constituents is that, right now, they are angry with the Conservative government. They are very disappointed and angry about what the Conservatives are proposing. What I hear people say most often is that we paid for the gun registry, we paid for the data. People are wondering why the government wants to destroy the data that taxpayers paid for.

As I mentioned earlier, the Liberals invested \$2 billion in this gun registry. It has already cost a great deal more than what it was supposed to. Now it will cost another \$2 billion to destroy it. It is unthinkable that a government that is trying to save money would destroy it. My suggestion is that the provinces be allowed to decide and that that the gun registry data be retained.

• (1050)

[English]

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member opposite for her comments on the government's promise made, promise kept to abolish the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry.

My hon. colleague opposite said that police officers would not enter buildings if they did not know that there were registered guns inside the building. I have had police officers, unsolicited, approach me to say that they were front line and the registry was useless. They said that they had to be prepared for anything when they responded

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to a call. I find it astonishing that she heard that from a front-line police officer.

Is the member opposite and her party committed to keeping the long gun registry if the Quebec government wants to have a registry? Also, if her party were ever to form a national government, would its position be to reinstate the long gun registry?

• (1055)

[Translation]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre: Madam Speaker, the member opposite just asked an excellent question. We do see a duality within our country. As I was saying, it is not for nothing that Quebecers want to keep the firearms registry. Quebec police officers consult the registry 17,000 times a day and they are asking that it be kept. Police officers in my riding have come to see me in person to say that they consult the registry. The Quebec National Assembly wants to keep the data from this registry because police officers want to consult it. The answer to the question is clear: Quebec wants to keep the registry and the data must be preserved because police officers in my province use it.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskaing, NDP): Madam Speaker, before asking my question, I would like to read from an email I received from Andréanne Joly from Kapuskasing:

Gun control works. Public health and safety experts have shown that tough legislation on firearms has reduced the rate of death by firearms. Issuing licences to owners and registering firearms are standard practices around the world. Abolishing the long gun registry will diminish our capacity to respect our international commitments on combatting trafficking in firearms.

In light of this email and the fact that over the past 10 years, 71% of spousal homicides were committed with a firearm and that 76% of those homicides were committed with a long gun, I support what my colleague is saying.

The Government of Quebec has asked that we keep the data. The Government of Canada says it wants to get rid of it. Can the hon. member perhaps compare this request and the government's response to with issue of the census? If I am not mistaken, the government did not get rid of the data from past censuses. The data are still available to help people make policy decisions.

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Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre: Madam Speaker, my colleague on this side of the House raised an excellent point. I liked her comments very much when she said that since the creation of the gun registry, we have seen a decrease in crime. The fact that long guns are often used in domestic disputes is also very important, as well as the fact that they are one of the main means of committing suicide. Police officers intervene and must enter a house in the case of a dispute, a suicide attempt or something like that. It is very important to keep the registry to protect the public and the lives of the police officers who keep our streets safe. I would like to reiterate that the Quebec government has asked that this information be kept. I hope that the government on the other side of the House will listen to the urgent demands from the province to keep this information, so that we do not end up spending millions of dollars more to put a gun registry back in place.

[English]

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am very proud to stand today to speak in favour of Bill C-19, the ending the long-gun registry act.

On May 2, Canadians gave our government a strong mandate to end this wasteful and ineffective long gun registry once and for all. That is exactly what we will do.

For the past seven years I have heard concerns from my constituents about the effectiveness of this registry and the fact that it targets law-abiding citizens and not criminals. My constituents want effective solutions that keep their streets and communities safe. That is why our government has taken concrete steps to improve our justice system. We have put forward tough new sentences to keep dangerous criminals where they belong: behind bars. We have also made major investments in crime prevention.

This is how we keep Canadians safe: tough sentences and smart crime prevention funding. It is not by promoting a measure that is essentially a glorified list of non-criminals that has cost billions of dollars and focuses on people who are already, by nature, law-abiding citizens. Targeting people like hunters, farmers and sport shooters is not going to stop crime, and in fact it has not.

I would like to focus my remarks today on the dictatorial legislation that is the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry.

As I have already stated, the registry is a collection of data regarding law-abiding hunters, farmers and sport shooters that is held by the Government of Canada. These data had been collected with a gun to our heads, so to speak, and under the threat of extreme punishment, including serious jail time. In our view and my view, this is simply wrong.

I am one of those individuals who reluctantly registered my long guns under this threat. I waited until the very last minute in 2003 to register my rifles and shotguns. I was the mayor of my municipality at the time, a role that I took just as seriously as my role as a member of Parliament. I feared that should some overzealous conservation officer or policeman charge me for owning an unregistered gun that had been legal for all my life, it would give me a criminal record that would disqualify me from holding public office, including as a member of Parliament.

Registering my long rifles, many of which are family keepsakes, was one of the toughest decisions I have ever had to make. I was made to feel like a common criminal if I did not comply, and it still sticks in my craw.

The previous Liberal government foisted this measure on law-abiding Canadians under the guise of preventing tragedies perpetrated by individuals who use firearms for criminal purposes. However, there is absolutely no evidence that the long gun registry has prevented a single crime or saved a single life.

I have heard the arguments from the opposition members, whose misguided view is that since Canadians must register cars, boats, ice shacks and so forth, then something as potentially dangerous as a shotgun or a rifle must also be registered. The key discrepancy shows, at best, a fundamental misunderstanding of the difference between administrative and criminal law or, at worst, a deliberate effort to muddy an important issue of fundamental liberty.

Guns do not kill people. Bad people with guns kill people.

If someone does not register their car, they will face a small fine, determined by the province in which they reside; if someone does not register their shotgun, they face the prospect of a criminal record or serious jail time or both. As Conservatives and as individuals who care about the protection of fundamental freedoms, we must stand up to say it is wrong to put people in jail for what amounts to paperwork errors.

My family, by nature, consists of law-abiding members of our community. My father, who is now 79, still hunts with me, my four brothers and many of his grandsons, including two of my sons. In fact, we will all be doing some deer hunting next week, which is an annual fall tradition. It is not just about the hunt or the kill; it is a family thing that has been going on for years in our family, and it will continue.

My dad also reluctantly registered his rifles and shotguns. He was issued a possession-only licence, or a POL, and was able to purchase ammunition for five years until his POL expired. Now, under the long gun registry, he is made to sneak around like a criminal and ask me or someone else with a valid POL or PAL to buy ammunition for his rifles, some of which he has owned since he was a teenager. This is just simply not right.

• (1100)

Bill C-19 is just a starting point. Bill C-19 does what we said we would do, eliminate the long gun registry.

As I said earlier, a person will still require a licence to own or purchase guns and ammunition. Further legislation will be required to make further improvements to this farce that the Liberals created. In my opinion, we need to merge the PAL and POL, so that there is one licence, and extend its duration from five years to ten. Also, anyone like my father, and thousands more across this country who, like him, have had a valid PAL or POL or a legal hunting licence in the past should be grandfathered into the system so that they do not have to prove again what they proved years ago, which is that they can safely operate a firearm.

Another change that I will push for is the creation of a prohibitive offenders registry. This registry would target people who have committed and are convicted of a firearms crime, the very people who give law-abiding gun owners a bad name. As I stated earlier, the gun registry is simply not an effective way to reduce crime.

As the hon. Minister of State for Small Business and Tourism so succinctly stated, "We measure results, not intent". The results simply are that there is no correlation between crimes committed with long guns and the implementation of a measure that needlessly targets law-abiding hunters, farmers and sport shooters.

I would also like to discuss a portion of the bill that has received significant attention from both the media and the opposition, and that is the destruction of the records contained in the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry.

The fact of the matter is that on May 2, and for the last five years, we have told Canadians we would get rid of the long gun registry once and for all if given the opportunity, and Canadians can take that promise to the bank. Let us examine what that means.

The registry is composed of a few components. It is compelled by the force of criminal law to collect the personal information and data of law-abiding gun owners. We will end that. It is also the retention of records of law-abiding gun owners. Obviously, when we said we would scrap the long gun registry, destroying those records was implicit. I might add that it should also include the records of individuals who buy ammunition. I license my truck, but when I buy brake pads or tires for my truck, I do not need to show my driver's licence. Neither should someone have to show a gun licence to buy ammunition. I will work hard to change that.

The registry is the records and the records are the registry. I realize the NDP and the Liberals would have us hang on to those records so that they could more easily recreate a backdoor registry should they ever have the chance to do so. Our government will not allow for that.

As the Minister of Public Safety said, claiming you want to scrap the registry but keep the records is like a farmer saying he will sell you his farm as long as he can keep the land. That is the way some of the opposition members think on this.

Frankly, it comes down to a single imperative. We made a commitment to Canadians that we will no longer target law-abiding hunters, farmers, and sport shooters through the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry, and this is exactly what we will do. We believe, as I stated earlier, that Canadians should be able to trust their politicians. When they promise to do something or vote for something, there should be no question and no second thought.

On that note, I would like to remind the members from Skeena—Bulkley Valley and the Western Arctic, who have recently decided to turn their backs on the wishes of their constituents and turn their backs on the commitments that they made on May 2, that they are breaking their election promise to their constituents. The memories of voters are long, especially on this important issue. Several of my new colleagues on this side of the House know this very well. The members from Yukon, Nipissing—Timiskaming, Sault Ste. Marie, and Ajax—Pickering are here in large part because their predeces-

sors forgot that they are supposed to represent their constituents to the government, not the other way around.

I hope that members opposite will listen to the views of Canadians and vote to end the nearly 17-year-old legacy of waste that is the long gun registry. In closing, as deer hunters in my riding, including myself, head to the bush next week, they can take solace that the government is finally getting rid of this hated, useless long gun registry.

• (1105)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskaing, NDP): Madam Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's comments. I do need to let him know that with respect to the last vote on the registry, the first place I went to was Wawa. It was the middle of hunting season, and a hunter came up to me and said, "Are you the one who voted to keep the registry?" I said, "Yes." He said, "I want to tell you that you did the right thing, because registering my gun has never prevented me from going hunting."

I also want to talk to my friend here about the statistics on domestic violence. One in three Canadian women who are killed by their spouses are shot. Eighty-eight percent of firearms are rifles and shotguns. Use of guns during these events has often resulted in multiple victims, and many times it is the children.

When a gun is involved, the chance of a woman's death increases by 12 times compared to other forms of violence. Even if guns are not directly fired on the women, they are often used as a tool of intimidation in rape or physical or psychological violence.

Finally, let us look at the statistics: there has been a 50% decrease in spousal homicides since.

Prior to the registry, businesses were required to keep records of the sale of non-restricted firearms. This bill makes no provision for reverting to that process. Why does the government want to reduce accountability and tracking of firearms beyond the repeal of the registry?

• (1110)

Mr. Larry Miller: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for her misguided question, or the misguided information before her question.

She represents a very beautiful riding; in fact, my family has had a hunting camp on Manitoulin Island for years. I am not sure if I am going to be able to join them, but my brothers and my dad will be heading up there in mid-November.

If anybody should be voting for this bill to get rid of the registry, this member should be. She mentioned a number of things. Domestic violence is a sad mark on any community and on life in general, but if we are going to concentrate on all things that contribute to domestic violence, are we going to ban kitchen knives, baseball bats, cast iron frying pans and whatever else? Let us be realistic.

We want to punish people who commit violent crimes. If the member is so concerned about violent crime, as she pretends she is, then she will be supporting our crime bill. That is the best way to deal with this.

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Unfortunately, we will never eliminate violence in our society. It is too bad, but it is a reality. We have to admit that and do other things to try to prevent those kinds of things.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have a quick question for the member: what does he have to hide? What is the big deal about registering a gun? What does the member have to hide? If he has nothing to hide, then who is he protecting?

The member mentioned the fact that he has to show a gun licence to get ammunition. What is the big deal? What does he have to hide?

Mr. Larry Miller: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for the question, I think.

The way the member asked the question clearly spells out the difference between urban and rural in this country. I mean no offence, but this member, who I have a lot of respect for in this House, just does not get it. People are made to feel like criminals. If I let my car licence or my truck licence lapse, I am not a criminal. I do not have a criminal record. With this gun registry, I would have one.

As we said, it is about licensing people, not licensing guns. Guns themselves do not kill people; bad people with guns do. What we need to do is bring in some measures, as we already have and will continue to do. We have to look at the importation of illegal guns crossing our borders. We have to look at having more border security and issues like that. We do not need to target law-abiding hunters.

Mrs. Kelly Block (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Madam Speaker, last spring, Canadians elected a government that was listening and keeping its promises. They told us they wanted a government that would make keeping their children and communities safe a priority. As promised, within the first 100 days of Parliament, we introduced Bill C-10.

My constituents spoke of wanting a strong and stable economy. Again, we delivered with the budget implementation act, making job growth and strengthening families a priority.

Farmers in my riding told me that they wanted freedom to market their own wheat and barley. Again, we delivered by introducing Bill C-18.

Finally, I regularly hear how wasteful the long gun registry is. I am very pleased that this government has now introduced Bill C-19 to end this discrimination against law-abiding citizens. We have listened and we are acting.

I am also very pleased to have this opportunity to speak in support of Bill C-19. This has been a long time coming. Certainly there are some members on this side of the House who have been dealing with this issue, debating it for approximately 17 years, and I am honoured to be among those who will rise in the House to debate this important legislation.

To be clear, there is no debate about the fact that we need effective ways of dealing with gun crime. That is not the issue. The issue is that the long gun registry does not deal with gun crime. It is wasteful, ineffective and does nothing to keep guns out of the hands of criminals. The simple fact is that long guns are not the weapon of choice for criminals. For the most part, criminals use handguns and the registration requirement for handguns is not going anywhere.

What we are doing is ensuring that law-abiding hunters, sports shooters and farmers are no longer being treated like criminals simply because they own a rifle or a shotgun. We are doing this because it is the right thing and because our constituents have told us for years that it is what they want.

Since taking office in 2006, our government has taken decisive action to put the rights of victims and law-abiding Canadians ahead of the rights of criminals. We have taken decisive action to make our streets and communities safer, to crack down on criminals and prevent crimes before they happen. Ending the long gun registry act is about ensuring that we continue to preserve and enhance those measures that do work to reduce crime and protect Canadians. It is also about ensuring that we do not unnecessarily penalize millions of honest and law-abiding citizens with rules that have little effect on crime prevention or on reducing gun crime.

As members have heard in the House, Bill C-19, first and foremost, would remove the need to register non-restricted firearms such as rifles and shotguns. Today, such non-restricted firearms are primarily used by farmers, hunters and residents of rural Canada to protect their livestock, hunt wild game or to otherwise earn a living.

Bill C-19 would not do away with the need to properly license all owners of firearms. In fact, it would retain not only the licensing system but also the strict system of controlling restricted and prohibited firearms. Nor would it do away with the need for the owners of restricted and prohibited firearms to obtain a registration certificate as well as a licence. Registration of restricted and prohibited firearms, including all handguns, would continue to be maintained by the RCMP firearms program. Our government has invested \$7 million per year to strengthen the licensing process by enhancing front-end screening of first-time firearms-licence applicants. This funding allows officials to screen an additional 20,000 applicants per year, including all applicants for restricted licences.

Under Bill C-19, farmers, duck hunters, target shooters and other law-abiding Canadians would still need to go through a licensing procedure. The bill would not change those measures. In determining eligibility to hold a licence, a person's criminal record, history of treatment for mental illness associated with violence or history of violent behaviour against another person would still be examined.

● (115)

Therefore, for those who have the misconception that we are somehow easing all of the checks and balances when it comes to gun ownership, as we can see, that is not the case. Rather, what is proposed are changes that would do away with the need to register long guns. The registry is wasteful, ineffective and unfairly targets law-abiding hunters and farmers.

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I know I have said this before, but it is important to repeat because some of my colleagues across the aisle just do not get it. By scrapping this wasteful and ineffective long gun registry, we can, instead, focus our efforts and resources on measures that actually tackle crime and make our communities safer. This is why Bill C-19 has the support of our government, as well as millions of Canadians. It is also why many hon. members on the other side of the House have voted to support similar legislation in previous Parliaments.

Our government's main priority is keeping our streets and communities safe. We will do that through programs and initiatives that work. That is why we moved quickly to reintroduce and pass the Safe Streets and Communities Act, which contains many important measures to protect families, stands up for victims and holds criminals accountable.

We have also introduced and passed mandatory prison sentences for serious gun crimes and we have passed legislation to initiate reforms to the pardons system. A lot of changes have taken place over the last five years that go a long way to keeping Canadians safe, changes that work, changes that make sense and changes that Canadians want. Personally, this is an issue I hear about from my constituents all the time. It is something they speak to me about at town halls, on the street and at meetings. They call, write letters and send emails, and I know my colleagues have experienced the same thing.

During the last election, we heard over and over again on doorsteps that it was time to scrap the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry. I am very proud that we can move forward in doing away with the Liberal legacy of waste and ineffectiveness. It is time for a new chapter. It is time to stop treating law-abiding Canadians like criminals. It is time to focus on measures that actually prevent crime. It is time for the opposition to support the bill.

• (1120)

[Translation]

Ms. Manon Perreault (Montcalm, NDP): Madam Speaker, the member spoke about being wasteful. I would like to know what they consider to be wasteful. Billions of dollars were given to the oil companies and spent on the G8 meeting. The government is still spending billions of dollars on the war in Afghanistan that is going nowhere. Do the Conservatives consider that wasteful? Do we think of it in terms of billions of dollars, or simply the fact that the gun registry costs about 10¢ per Canadian?

Toronto's Chief of Police, William Blair, said that the gun registry gives officers information that keeps them safe, and that if it were abolished, police officers might be able to guess, but they could not be certain. Similarly, Chief Daniel Parkinson, the president of the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police, said that eliminating the federal gun registry would put our officers at risk and undermine their ability to prevent and solve crimes.

I do not think we can talk about waste when talking about the gun registry. What I consider to be wasteful can be attributed to the Conservatives. Is keeping the public safe considered wasteful?

[English]

Mrs. Kelly Block: Madam Speaker, on May 2, Canadians gave us a strong mandate to deliver on this campaign commitment.

Our government has always been very clear. We support the repealing of the long gun registry because it unfairly targets law-abiding farmers and hunters, not criminals. That is wasteful.

On this side of the House we support gun control measures that actually work, measures that stop crime and keep guns out of the hands of criminals. That is not wasteful.

The long gun registry does neither. It does not deter criminals from using guns, protect Canadians from gun violence, nor protect front-line officers in the line of duty. It is simply a list of law-abiding gun owners, and it is bad policy.

I would urge all members in this place to support the bill.

• (1125)

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague, the member for Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, for her spot-on comments on this.

I would like to go back to some of the comments that were made by the member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, when he talked about registration and how people said that they had to register their vehicle, so why not register their guns? It is crazy. If I choose not to drive my car, I do not have to register it. If I choose to be a collector of long guns, or I store them or I inherit a family heirloom but will never use it, this is an intrusive type of difference in the long gun registry bill, which is just one aspect of why this is so crazy and why it is important for us to get rid of it.

Could she comment on what the bill would do to protect the infringement on the rights of people to collect and inherit family heirlooms without being imprisoned, for example?

Mrs. Kelly Block: Madam Speaker, I recognize that the hon. member for Tobique—Mactaquac has worked long and hard, trying to see that this type of legislation gets passed in the House.

Since 2006, our government has introduced three bills to repeal the long guns registry. We introduced a bill in 2006, again in 2007 and again in April 2009. We did this for the very reasons my colleague raised. Some individuals collect guns and feel like criminals if they do not want to register them. That is truly one of the issues we have heard over and over again from constituents.

By introducing Bill C-19, we are following through on our government's commitment to eliminate this wasteful and ineffective long gun registry. We are following through on a commitment that Canadians want.

Government Orders

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, more than 20 years ago, the funeral of nine young women took place at Montreal's main cathedral. Along with five others, they were killed in what became known as the Montreal massacre. The murders devastated our country. The massacre changed the lives of students at school, women around the country and all Canadians and their families. We went to vigils. We walked the street in Take Back the Night marches. We said "never again".

As a result, both Canada's police chiefs and victims groups supported the creation of the long gun registry. The law was passed in 1995 and went into effect in 2001. I will share some of the data: firearms registered as of September 2011, 7,865,000; non-restricted firearms, 7,137,000; firearms per 100,000 population, Prince Edward Island has the lowest rate at 18,000 and Yukon has the highest at 87,000.

Violence against women and girls is one of the most widespread violations of human rights. It takes place in the home, on the streets, in schools, in the workplace and in farm fields, et cetera. Violence against women is a \$4 billion tragedy in Canada.

Every year, 100,000 women and children leave their homes fleeing violence and abuse. Almost 20,000 women go to 31 YWCA shelters across Canada looking for safety.

Among service providers working to end violence against women there is no rural-urban divide on the registry. YWCA, Canada's national network of shelters, is urban and rural, and in every province and territory this shelter and transition house associations support the long gun registry.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women requires that countries party to the convention take all appropriate steps to end violence. Why then would Canada destroy the long gun registry that protects women and girls, particularly with Canada leading the global effort for an international day of the girl?

Most women who are murdered are killed by their husbands, partners or ex-partners. Many are killed in rages. The man finds his hunting gun. Since the introduction of stricter gun laws in 1991, there has been a 65% reduction in homicides by long guns. From 1995 to 2010, there was a 41% reduction in homicides by long guns. The number of women killed with shotguns has fallen every year.

Sue O'Sullivan, the federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime, issued a statement saying that most victims groups want the registry maintained:

Our position on this matter is clear. Canada must do all it can to prevent further tragedies from happening, including using the tools we have to help keep communities safe, like the long gun registry.

The YWCA wrote:

Women have told us that the guns used here [in the North] predominantly for hunting—that is, long guns—are also used to intimidate, subdue and control them. We hear this over and over again, in small communities without RCMP and in larger communities with RCMP. Women do not want these guns to be unregistered, but do not feel safe expressing this opinion other than in whispers to people who may be able to voice these "unpopular" opinions and who may be heard.

The government ignores the evidence of decreasing long gun deaths associated with the creation of the registry and it ignores

women's voices. Instead, it argues that many of the firearms used to commit murder are never registered. It uses a Statistics Canada report that said that, of 253 firearms used to commit murder between 2005 and 2009, almost 70% had never been registered. What the government does not share is that the same report also said that, of 179 homicides using firearms in 2009, 24% were committed using rifles and shotguns.

• (1130)

Despite the government's attempt to change the subject, the reality is that the gun registry saves lives. The registry reduces the human costs but it also reduces economic costs. I will explain.

While we acknowledge that the cost of establishing the registry was more than \$1 billion, the total annual cost of firearm-related injuries in Canada was \$6.6 billion. The annual cost of operating the registry is thought to be \$4 million, a pittance when compared to the cost of firearm-related injuries.

Interpersonal violence refers to violence between family members and intimate partners and violence between acquaintances and strangers that is not intended to further the aims of any formally defined group or cause. Interpersonal violence is expensive. Gun violence, which includes suicides, has alone been calculated at over \$100 billion in the United States.

In Canada, the cost of gunshot wounds per survivor admitted to hospital is \$435,000. Evidence shows that the public sector and not society in general bears much of the economic burden of interpersonal violence. Economic studies show that preventive interventions to stop interpersonal violence save more than they cost and, in some cases, by several orders of magnitude.

We repeatedly hear from the government that it is committed to ensuring hard-earned taxpayer dollars are spent wisely. If that is the case, why will the government not keep the long gun registry that saves lives and reduces economic costs?

Now the government says that it intends to destroy all the information about long gun owners that has been collected. Why would the government destroy gun registry information that is used by police across Canada more than 17,000 times per day?

Canadians should know that of the last 18 police officers, the people who put their lives on the line for Canada each day, 14 of them or 78% were killed by long guns. The government claims that it cannot help because the Privacy Act forbids collecting personal data for one purpose and then transferring it to be used for another purpose. Perhaps the real reason is that it wants to erase the data to prevent future federal governments from ever reviving the registry.

Some provinces might want to create their own registries if the bill is passed. The Quebec government has already sent a letter asking Ottawa to let it keep the data from the federal long gun registry. The provincial legislature passed a unanimous motion only for the fourth time since 2006 asking Ottawa to keep the registry.

Police agencies had specifically requested that they be able to continue to consult the database. Our leader has said:

The data collected over the last 16 years must be preserved, so that provinces can salvage this important policing tool.

The Minister of Public Safety responded by saying that the government has made it very clear that, "We will not participate in the recreation of the long-gun registry, and therefore the records that have been created under that long-gun registry will be destroyed".

I do not support this bill, which would destroy the long gun registry and its data, jeopardize the health of Canadians, particularly that of women, and cost society billions. What is at stake is not a piece of paper or a requirement that people have. What is at stake are people's lives.

• (1135)

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, we have heard the same thing repeated over and over by the NDP and the Liberals on this issue.

I have discussed this with members of some of the groups the member cites as supporting the retention of the gun registry. I have found that they do not even understand the connection between the gun registry and some of the things that are being cited as reasons to continue to support it.

Most people do not realize that laying a piece of paper beside a gun is what the gun registry is all about. It does not control what happens with the firearm, who is using it or any of those kinds of things. In fact, what the member is suggesting defies common sense. When I explain to these people what the registry is, they have to admit that it has no connection.

The statistics that the member quotes are irrelevant to this. The decline in firearms deaths began in the 1970s. It had nothing to do with the registry, which began in 1995. Over half the guns in the country are still not registered. The fact that these statistics are somehow quoted as being connected to the registry shows how completely out of touch the member is with the reality of the situation. I wish I could explain more—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I must give the hon. member time to respond.

The hon. member for Etobicoke North.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Madam Speaker, as a scientist, I find it incredulous that statistics would be irrelevant.

Government Orders

The member mentioned people he had talked to. A group of mothers who lost sons and daughters to gun violence penned an open letter to Canadians to save the gun registry. The letter was signed by Elaine Lumley; Karen Vanscoy whose daughter, Jasmine, was killed in 1996; Suzanne Laplante-Edward, mother of Anne-Marie, killed at École Polytechnique in December 1989; Louise Hevey, mother of Anastasia, killed at Dawson College in September 2006. These mothers understand.

The mothers wrote that at least six public inquests have emphasized the importance of licensing gun owners and registering all firearms: "a small inconvenience for the privilege of owning a gun".

They further wrote:

There will be no turning back if they are successful.... This will be a terrible waste of the money that was spent in building the system.

How would the hon. member respond to those mothers?

• (1140)

Hon. Laurie Hawa (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the heartfelt comments of the member opposite. I know she feels strongly about this but heartfelt does not replace common sense.

The member quoted statistics about what happened after 1995 on the decline in gun deaths, which my hon. colleague on this side correctly pointed out started in 1971. Why was there no increase in the rate of decrease of gun deaths in 1995? Why did it just continue? If the long gun registry had such an effect, why was there no change in that slope and it just continued? It is because it had started 25 years before.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Madam Speaker, if we look at the statistics, I was very clear in what I presented during my speech on how the numbers have gone down in the various years.

On another point, I would like to demonstrate the power of the registry from an incident found in the Canadian firearms program report.

Family members contacted the local police because the father was in a depressed state and they wanted the police to remove all of the firearms from their home. Family members told the police what firearms were in the house and then the police checked the registry. The Canadian Firearms Registry online query by local police indicated that there were 21 additional long guns in the home that the other family members knew nothing about. A warrant was obtained and all firearms were removed by police preventing a potential firearms tragedy. Without the registry, there would not have been any knowledge of the additional 21 firearms.

Hon. Peter Penashue (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise in support of Bill C-19, ending the long-gun registry act.

Government Orders

It is a subject that is of real importance to the good people of my riding in Labrador. In fact, it is an issue that people from across Newfoundland and Labrador feel strongly about. I am proud to stand here today and ensure that their perspective is heard.

As members know, Labrador is one of the more rural ridings in Canada. That is a source of real pride for us. It is also one with an unavoidable reality.

In Labrador many people rely on hunting. That does not mean they do it from time to time. It is part of their way of life. It is part of putting food on the table for their families. It is the way people make ends meet. It is the way of life in Labrador. We enjoy that life.

This may seem unusual for those members who live in urban areas. Maybe those members would find many things unusual about daily life in the north.

For example, one would not expect to see a bear in the city when putting out garbage in the morning. In the city people are not expected to have killed and skinned the animal they would be serving their families that same evening. That is what makes Canada great. We are a country made up of distinct regions and cultures.

Canada is a strong country because we stand up for and respect each other's differences. That is part of why the long gun registry is so particularly offensive to the people of Labrador. Not only does it question the way of life that has been part of Labrador for generations but it criminalizes people who have as much right to their way of life as any other Canadian across the country.

I will begin with one of many stories I know from the people of Labrador who are firmly against the long gun registry.

I am proud to say that I have been a responsible long gun owner for many years. I was raised by my grandfather, Matthew, and from a very young age I was taught how to use a long gun as a hunting tool. I was taught to respect it as well.

Every year from September until December and April until June we would spend time in the country out on the land. Managing our long guns in a safe and responsible manner was essential to our survival and maintaining our way of life.

There is a respect and discipline that comes with responsible firearm ownership. It is something that is not discussed enough in the debate surrounding this issue. I often find that the critics who are the most vocal about long guns are also the ones who least understand the issues.

Like other members in the House, I will admit that I own unregistered long guns. Like many Canadians across the country, I did start the process of registering my guns.

• (1145)

There are those who say that the process of registering a long gun is easy and straightforward. My own experience and the experience of many millions of others suggests that this is not always the case. The process is confusing and complex. On top of that, the only available help that is provided for people who live in the north is a telephone number. That telephone number can be called multiple times and it will ring and ring some more, but there will be no one to pick up the phone at the other end.

I know I am not alone on this issue. I have spoken to many others who have found the same thing. In addition to this, I know that many of my constituents do not speak English or French. The situation is the same for many first nations, Métis and Inuit in ridings across the north. These are hard-working people who have lived their way of life for generations. On top of that, they are being made to comply with regulations that cast them as potential criminals. They have to contend with the language barrier which makes the process even more confusing.

There we are, at the mercy of a process that makes us criminals if we do not comply. But by virtue of who we are and where we come from, we find it virtually impossible to obey the law. In effect, we are being set up to fail, to be criminalized, and to be on the wrong side of the law.

Why, one may ask? It is because who we are and where we come from is fundamentally misunderstood by the people who created this law. In fact, it is clear that either they did not understand or they did not care. The result is the same.

Which brings me to another point that I want to bring up behalf of all northerners. The long gun registry was set up because the Liberal government of the day was trying to respond to a terrible crime that had happened. Indeed it was terrible. We still mourn that tragedy today.

However, the long gun registry was put in place because those who created it said it would help prevent gun crimes. I believe what this debate over the past few days has shown is that the long gun registry does nothing to stop crime. It does nothing to stop criminals from using guns to harm innocent people. It was intended to be a solution against crime, but all it does is target those who live off the land and make their living by hunting while it does nothing to deliver an actual solution to a problem.

Yet, for too many years, it has been acceptable to other governments to pretend that one problem is being addressed while completely ignoring the impact that the problem is creating on millions of Canadians across the country.

It has been our government and our government alone that has consistently stood against this fundamental miscarriage of justice. It is our government that has stood for the law-abiding hunters and farmers. That is why, today, I will be voting with my fellow members on this side of the House to abolish the long gun registry.

• (1150)

I will also take the opportunity to point out to members from the other parties who sit on the fence that the people of Labrador spoke clearly on this issue in the past election. They wanted the long gun registry eliminated and placed their vote with the party they knew would deliver.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Perhaps the hon. minister can complete his intervention during questions and comments.

The hon. member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing.

Government Orders

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Madam Speaker, I listened to my colleague's speech and he talked about the fact that the people of Labrador spoke very clearly on this issue. Maybe I could remind him that there was certainly a big change across Canada in the last election. On this issue, for example, four out of six candidates talked about moving the bill to committee for discussion and after the study was conducted, decided it was best not to get rid of the gun registry. Four out of six members in the NDP subsequently increased their total vote margin in their victories in this spring's election over their 2008 results. I want to ensure the member is clear on the fact that there were other issues that changed the demographic of politics.

I want to point out to him that it only cost 10¢ per Canadian to put the registry in place. It is a program that police say is safe and one of the best tools. They do not use it every day. It is like their guns, which they do not use every day.

I would like to ask my colleague a question. Since I was elected three years ago, I have only had four calls for interventions on the gun registry. Since he was elected, how many calls has he had?

Hon. Peter Penashue: Madam Speaker, I have had the opportunity to meet many Labradorians during the election campaign and in my travels it was made quite clear to me that people did not appreciate the long gun registry, nor did they appreciate the commitment that was broken by the previous member for my riding, who had agreed to abolish the gun registry and subsequently changed his mind. Of course, there was a 30% change in the vote, which tells me and others that the people of Labrador were absolutely opposed to the gun registry and their votes indicated that decision.

• (1155)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. member opposite a question. Many people are concerned about maintaining the gun registry. For example, last week, Quebec's National Assembly—which represents the province as a whole—voted in favour of a motion stating that if the registry were abolished at the federal level, the province would create a new one. The province feels the registry is so important that it would like to create a provincial one. The people of Quebec will have to pay twice for the same registry because they want to use and keep this information so that police officers can use it for public safety reasons.

How can the government justify the fact that Quebec will have to create a second registry if this bill is passed?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Penashue: Madam Speaker, it is fair and fitting to make the point that the process that has been abolished at this point is a definite commitment to Canadians who voted for change. Our government has no intention of transferring the information that it has in its offices to the provinces, nor will it make available that same information to be used by future governments to be re-enacted or brought back in the future.

Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am honoured to rise today to debate Bill C-19, the ending the long gun registry bill.

Many of my hon. colleagues on both sides of the House have spoken on this topic. I am glad there has been such robust debate happening over this important issue. In fact, we know this is a topic that evokes strong emotions in the hearts and minds of Canadians from coast to coast to coast. For my part, it was certainly an issue that I heard a great deal about as I went door to door during the most recent election campaign. I am very glad, therefore, to have the opportunity to speak about it today. This is a very important issue in my riding in British Columbia, where many farmers and hunters live.

As members know, Canadians gave our government a strong mandate to deliver on our law and order agenda. We have been clear that we will pursue tough on crime measures that work and that protect law-abiding Canadian families.

We were also clear, completely clear, about our government's position on ending the failed long gun registry. For many years now, we have said that we disagree with it on principle, that it is wasteful and ineffective, and that there is no evidence that it prevents crime or protects front-line police officers.

Bill C-19, the ending the long gun registry bill, is the manifestation of an ongoing promise on which, as Conservatives, we have been working to deliver for many years now. We have been working to end the registry because it simply is not working. For example, the registry is quite incomplete and the information is inaccurate. We have heard from many front-line police officers who are simply not confident in this information. This means that as a tool, it could do more harm than good.

In addition to being incomplete and inaccurate, we do not have any statistical evidence that the long gun registry has made a difference to crime rates. We hear from some hon. members that there is a decline in the crime rate as a result of the long gun registry. In fact, when we look at the numbers, the long-term trend in firearm-related homicide has nothing to do with the long gun registry. In fact, it has been in steady decline since the 1970s.

In addition, the overall rate of firearm-related violent crime was driven primarily by the use of handguns. Long guns do not factor heavily into crimes. In the instances where they do, there is absolutely no evidence that the registration of a long gun as part of the registry program has any impact on combatting crime.

Government Orders

In terms of how police officers use the data, for too long, all Canadians were led to believe that the long gun registry would help make us safer. We were told that it is a tool our police depend upon. This is simply not accurate. For example, we have heard numbers quoted that police use the long gun registry up to 11,000 times a day. The reality is that when a police officer accesses the Canadian Police Information Centre, or CPIC, for any reason, including a simple address check, an automatic hit to the registry is generated. This hit will always be generated whether the information from it is desired or not.

In addition, the long gun registry does not enhance public safety because it does not put the focus on stopping real crime. The emphasis is not placed on stopping criminals from using firearms to commit crimes. In fact, the emphasis is placed on ensuring we have a list of law-abiding long gun owners. This does not prevent criminals from obtaining firearms.

In Canada a person should not be deemed a criminal if he or she owns a long gun. Bill C-19 would end this unfortunate episode of penalizing law-abiding hunters and farmers, such as those I have come to know in my riding, and would help us continue our government's focus on action that would actually help to prevent crime.

On that note, let me take a moment to review what Bill C-19 would actually do, as we have seen a lot of hysteria from the members of the opposition which does not accurately reflect what this legislation would accomplish.

First, the ending the long gun registry bill would do just what it says it would do. It would end the failed long gun registry.

• (1200)

In ending the registry, the bill would also make provisions for the destruction of the records that were collected as part of the long gun registry. That means the names and information collected from law-abiding long gun owners would not be shared, stored or sealed. The information would be destroyed and would not be held in the event that a new registry or a renewed registry could be created at any time, either soon or years down the road.

We have certainly heard a great deal from the opposition on this issue. Hon. members want to know why we will not share this information with the provinces. As the Minister of Public Safety quite rightly pointed out, we made a commitment to Canadians that we would scrap the long gun registry. This means that in destroying the registry, we would destroy the data as well. Ending the registry but then sharing the data would be akin to selling the farm but keeping the land. We will fulfill the promise that we made and that includes doing the right thing and ensuring that no other government could use the information to resurrect the failed long gun registry.

I also want to note, as several of my hon. colleagues on this side of the House have noted as well, that Bill C-19 would not alter existing registration rules for restricted and prohibited firearms. The same rules and regulations would apply concerning handguns, semi-automatic or any other currently restricted and prohibited firearms. The application for ownership of these types of firearms is much more vigorous, even more so for those which are prohibited. Police would still have access to all of this information to ensure they know

who owns a handgun or a semi-automatic firearm, as well as where they live. Police would still have access to the licensing data of any type of firearm should this bill pass.

However, Bill C-19 would finally put an end to an expensive bureaucracy that criminalizes the honest, that does nothing to deter those who commit gun crime, and that simply does not do what it was supposed to do.

I have heard from countless Canadians especially in my riding of Delta—Richmond East that the long gun registry is simply not worth it. It has always been the focus of this government to take concrete action for the safety of Canadians. That is always uppermost in our minds. We have a proven record of delivering measures that not only crack down on criminals but also protect victims and give law enforcement the tools it needs to get its very important job done.

From our Tackling Violent Crime Act in 2006, which created longer mandatory minimum sentences for gun crimes and drive-by shootings, to delivering initiatives that help prevent crime before it happens, such as the youth gang prevention fund, this government is serious about tackling gun crime the right way.

A government's job is to enact policy that works. As we stand here today, for far too long it has been clear that the long gun registry does not work. It is time to end this registry once and for all.

• (1205)

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Patry (Jonquière—Alma, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if I understood correctly, if someone buys or is in possession of a restricted weapon, a collector's gun, a semi-automatic weapon, etc., a licence is required. But if someone wants to buy a shotgun or a long gun, a hunting rifle, no licence is required. Is that correct? Have I understood correctly?

[English]

Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay: Mr. Speaker, no, that is not correct. There are still licensing provisions. We are not tampering with those. What we are changing and what we are committed to doing is to end the long gun registry and the data associated with it.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I just need to make a comment on the last question from the other side. A common mistake that people make is they confuse licensing with the registry.

I want to point out that 92% of front-line officers had no use for the gun registry. That is from a survey which was done only a couple of years ago. I often hear people on the other side say that the police support this. That is not true.

My main comment is in regard to the quotation from the other side that somehow all these people who represent victim groups support the registry. In conversation with them, they do not understand that the registry is simply a piece of paper lying beside a gun. It has no connection to preventing crime from occurring.

I ask the member, if we had used that billion dollars or the tens of millions of dollars that are now being spent on the registry to target the root causes of crime and violence in our society, would that be a better and more effective use of our resources?

Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay: Mr. Speaker, our approach to crime in Canada has always been holistic. We do look at crime prevention in all aspects. As I mentioned in my speech, we have a youth crime prevention fund and other initiatives.

There are many areas in which this money could have been put to better use to deal with victims of crime, to help those who perhaps at an early age get involved in crime and to prevent them from becoming more serious criminals. There are so many ways this money could have been better spent.

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Raynault (Joliette, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the hon. member.

Past government bills regarding the elimination of the gun registry required owners who wished to sell their guns or give them away to ensure that the new owner actually held a hunting or owner's licence. But this bill does not contain a similar measure.

How can the government be sure that weapons will be transferred solely to people who possess a valid licence?

[English]

Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay: Mr. Speaker, I am not entirely sure I understood my colleague's question. What I can say is that we made a commitment, our commitment was clear, and we are following through on that commitment.

In terms of being sure as to what weapons may be part of this, there is not going to be a registry, and whether a gun was part of that will no longer be relevant. The licensing portions are still in place. There are still checks and balances. This is very targeted legislation, thoroughly thought out. It will go a long way toward decriminalizing law-abiding Canadians and making sure we go after those who hurt law-abiding Canadians.

• (1210)

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as with other rural MPs, there has been a lot of pressure on me to support abolition of the gun registry. Since 2004, however, I have supported the registry. It has been a divisive issue in communities, but nevertheless, I have been able to win three elections because I believe the majority of my constituents support retention of the registry.

People contact my office and want to hear my position. I will quote a bit from some of the letters I send out. I say in one letter that my position is basically this, "If there is some evidence that the registry helps police in their work, if there is some evidence, then it would be wrong to scrap it. I am personally prepared, for example, to keep my rifles registered if this in any way keeps our country safe".

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The other thing that I have been saying is that I understand that the powerful American National Rifle Association would like us to scrap all existing gun laws. I find this unacceptable.

Interestingly enough, according to the RCMP's Canadian firearms program, long guns are the most common type of firearms used in spousal homicide. There is some evidence that gun registration may be working. Between 1991 and 2007, the murder rate of women by firearms dropped by 67%, while the total murder rate by rifles and shotguns declined by 76%. Total firearms death in Canada decreased by 57%.

Of course there are those who would say that these statistics do not mean anything, that they are irrelevant, but I will come back to my main point. If there is some evidence that it works, why scrap it? Why not try to modify the registry and ensure that it is acceptable to all Canadians?

The other thing I would like to mention is that there is a train of thought circulating on the Internet and among some associations that somehow this registry is an affront to our liberty, that we have the right to have arms and we should not have to register them because if they are registered, then a fascist government could somehow get into power and seize all our weapons. It cites the example of Nazi Germany and all of that kind of stuff. Actually, I was going to ask my colleague who spoke before me if she subscribed to that philosophy, which I believe is pure rubbish.

My personal experience with the process of obtaining and renewing a PAL, as we call it, as well as with registering my rifles, has been very smooth. Both before and since being elected, and over the four years and more since I first took office, I have listened to different people and groups within the riding. There are conflicting views, but I have made a decision that, once again, if there is some evidence that it works, why do we not just retain it.

I have a press release in the *Globe and Mail* of May 6, 2010, and I would like to quote Mr. Charles Momy, president of the Canadian Police Association. In the article he says that he wants to make it clear that his members stand shoulder to shoulder with their chiefs on the issue. Two weeks after Conservative MPs derided the police leadership as a cult that pretended the long gun registry saved lives. Mr. Momy said:

—front-line cops disagree with their chiefs on a number of issues, but while they support the Conservative government's law-and-order policies, the gun-registry is a different matter. We're going there together to show a united front.... We want to make it clear to Canadians and politicians and everyone else that we are not divided among the various groups

According to Mr. Momy, police can use the gun registry to help solve gun crimes, prevent suicide and find out about potential dangers when they enter a house or approach a suspect. He said, "the Conservative government's approach is like taking away a police officer's sidearm or baton because he or she hasn't had to use them".

Government Orders

Once again, if a number of people on the front line are saying it works, and some say it does not, why get rid of it? Why risk the chance of putting the lives of our police officers in danger or endanger other Canadians?

• (1215)

The RCMP defends the registry. For example, the RCMP officer in charge of the National Gun Registry, and this is from the *Winnipeg Free Press*, on May 5, 2010, said, "it is a misconception that only people who do not register guns ever use them for deadly purposes".

RCMP chief superintendent and former director general of the Canadian firearms program, Marty Cheliak, said, "No legislation or regulation will ever prevent all crimes". He went on to say, "However the...program does serve a very real purpose and contributes to police officer safety and the safety of all Canadians". According to Cheliak, "40 per cent of the guns police traced back to an owner in 2009 were registered, non-restricted long guns—or 1,600 of the 4,000 recovered that year. Those guns would no longer need to be registered" if the current bill were passed.

I want to make a slight diversion here to touch on the whole crime policy in general that the government is presenting. I would like to quote from the *Red Deer Advocate*, a publication in Alberta, which as we know is no hotbed of socialist left-wing thought. In its editorial it says:

It's been said that if you're in the United States and have an urge to commit a crime, steer clear of Texas, which is reputed to be America's toughest crimefighting state. But apparently that's not really the case. Texas has seen the light. By spending more money on rehabilitative programs—not more jails and tougher laws—the state has helped turn offenders into constructive citizens. Costs to taxpayers have fallen and so has the crime rate.

To that end, Texas officials took the unusual step earlier this week of warning [our] Prime Minister...that...Bill C-10 to get tough on criminals will fail. And a coalition of experts in Washington, D.C., said tougher laws are counterproductive. Costs will skyrocket, there's little hope for rehabilitation and the streets won't be safer.

The article goes on to say:

The Tories want more prisons, longer jail terms, mandatory minimum sentences and the power to tell judges how to do their job. A justice system that strives to be fair and flexible could be seriously eroded.

I want to highlight the fallacies of the whole crime agenda that the government is forcing upon Canadians. To make an analogy with the gun registry, in Canada we have a system of justice that works. Our crime rate has been going down. It is much safer to live in Vancouver than in Detroit or any other major American city and yet we want to take more people and put them into prisons.

We have a gun registry that cost many billions of dollars, but now runs at around \$4 million a year. Even if we do not register long guns, the cost will still be the same because of other arms that have to be registered. Therefore, a system that is basically in place, instead of tweaking it or calling for the decriminalization of this, as we are calling for as a party, we need to abolish it, not only abolish it, but the government is saying to destroy all records so that other provinces such as the province of Quebec, even if it chooses to do so because it is the will of the people, cannot use the gun registry. This does not make any sense.

As the Canadian Association of Police Boards says:

It may be that the Firearms Registry is not perfect. If so, let us improve, not dismantle it.

It may be that there are people in your community who have legitimate concerns about certain aspects of the Registry. If so, let us work together to address those legitimate concerns.

That is what my party has been saying ever since these bills were introduced, including the private member's bill during the last Parliament. It may be that there is need for better public awareness in parts of Canada, including other constituencies. If so, let us work together to create that awareness instead of dividing our country as the Prime Minister and the government have done on this question. Let us not be complicit in doing one thing, and that is destroy a basically good safeguard that works in the public interest.

There are some myths that the firearms registry is a financial boondoggle and costs billions to run. In 2009 it cost \$4.1 million to operate the long gun registry.

• (1220)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a registered long gun can be legally in the possession of a different individual at a different location so long as the other person possesses a POL or a PAL, just like a car can be loaned to someone else so long as that person possesses a licence.

How can the member opposite say that law enforcement officers are assisted by the long gun registry in knowing where firearms are stored when this is not even a requirement of the long gun registry?

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague mentioned cars. A stolen car can often be used to kill somebody, and that does happen.

I am not the one who is saying this. The people on the front lines are saying that it is possible that the gun registry helps them in their job. If that small possibility exists, why throw it out? Why not improve it? Why not modify it? Why not make it workable for everybody instead of doing what the government is doing? The government is throwing everything out. When we look at the consequences in 10 or 20 years, we might think we should have kept the registry.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday in the House we discussed cancer-causing asbestos and the only members who seemed to believe that asbestos did not cause cancer were Conservative members. Today we are discussing the registry and it seems like the only people who think the gun registry is useless, that it costs billions of dollars, that the police do not agree with it, are Conservative members.

Could the hon. member tell me where the Conservative ideology comes from? Why are the Conservatives so hypocritical about the gun registry and asbestos?

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Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Speaker, I really do not know how decisions are made by members across the aisle. It does not make any sense to take asbestos out of our buildings to make our country safer, yet continue to export it to other countries. It is almost as if we do not care about people in other parts of the world, so we get an apology that somehow it is fine.

When representatives of our law enforcement officers are saying that the registry should be modified instead of being done away with, it does not make sense that the government continues with this ideological move. When people in the legal profession are questioning the government's whole crime agenda, from lawyers and people in the United States, who are saying it is not working, it does not make any sense that the government continues to do this.

I have absolutely no idea as to why the Conservatives have this ideological train of thought.

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since my hon. colleague likes to quote former president of the CPA, Charles Momy, here is what the Canadian Police Association is saying:

[The Minister of Public Safety] consulted regularly with our Association and our members to ensure that any changes would have minimal impact on public safety.

We look forward to continuing to work with the Minister to find effective tools and resources to keep guns off our streets, and out of the hands of criminals.

Does the member agree with the CPA's position now since he is so inclined to quote the previous president?

• (1225)

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Speaker, there are many positions out there. Since I have been here, I have noticed that members will stand up for the interests of farmers, for example, or other organizations and then when they get pressure from the government and other groups, they suddenly change their position. They seem to think that if they do not change their position, it will be harder to work with the government even though it might contradict their position.

I would like to spend some time with that gentleman, face to face, to find out what went on to make this change of statement.

Hon. Lynne Yelich (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very glad to add my voice to this important debate on Bill C-19, Ending the Long-gun Registry Act, which would finally put an end to what was an unnecessary, wasteful and ineffective long gun registry. It is a bill that has been a long time coming.

For too long, the failed long gun registry has been in place making criminals of law-abiding hunters and farmers, while doing nothing to prevent gun crime in Canada. The majority of homicides committed in Canada do not involve long guns at all. Statistics have shown that rifles and shotguns are not the problem because they are not the weapon of choice for criminals.

There seems to be a misconception that keeping the long gun registry will somehow prevent gun crimes with illicit hand guns from happening. The truth is that those gun crimes have happened despite the long gun registry being in place.

The long gun registry is a waste of taxpayer money and it is ineffective. One of the responsibilities of government is to put in place programs that are cost effective and which actually work. The

long gun registry accomplishes neither. For many years, we have seen ongoing discussions in the media, in government and by the Auditor General of just how wasteful and ineffective the long gun registry actually is.

With costs reaching as high as \$2 billion and no tangible evidence that a long gun registry does anything to reduce crime, there have been continuous calls to end this boondoggle. Despite the attempts of long gun registry supporters to convince Canadians that the long gun registry is saving lives, there is simply no scientific data to back this up. It is clear to many millions of Canadians that the long gun registry is both wasteful and ineffective. It is for these reasons that our government has worked, since taking office, to end the long gun registry.

Over the last several days of the debate, we have heard a great deal of hyperbole from members of the opposition about what the scrapping of the long gun registry will actually mean. The way some members have been talking, one would think that this bill would remove all restrictions on firearms. This is misleading and it is wrong.

Bill C-19 is about ending the long gun registry and destroying the records that make up the long gun registry. Other tools and controls on firearms will remain in place. To lawfully possess a firearm, every Canadian must be in possession of a valid firearms licence, and anyone who wants to acquire a firearm must undergo the required Canadian firearms safety course. This is a comprehensive 10-hour classroom course that gives students a working knowledge of safe firearms handling and it ensures that they are familiar with the laws and procedures regarding the ownership of firearms.

As part of this licence application, all individuals are also screened. They are screened to ensure that there is no reason to believe that the public will be in danger if that individual gains a licence. This includes checking the people's criminal record to see if they have been prohibited by law to own a gun or if they pose a danger to society. Once individuals do acquire a licence, they must renew it regularly.

As noted, none of that will change with the legislation that it is being discussed today. In fact, to strengthen the components of the licensing system that actually works, we have invested \$7 million annually to improve the screening process for first-time firearms licensees, and we believe there is help keeping firearms out of the hands of people who should not have them.

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Our second area of focus is the work we have done to strengthen the punishment for gun crimes. We passed legislation that sets out mandatory prison sentences for serious gun crimes, as well as reversed bail provisions for serious offences. We have put in place laws that target drive-by and other intentional shootings that demonstrate a reckless disregard for safety of others.

There is now a mandatory minimum sentence of 4 years in prison, up to a maximum of 14 years for these crimes, and minimum sentences go up to 5 years if the individual committed the act on behalf of a criminal organization or using a restricted or prohibited hand gun or automatic weapon. These are tough measures that send a strong message. They send a strong message that those who commit violent crimes will face serious consequences.

• (1230)

We have also taken decisive action to boost the number of police officers on the ground to combat crimes in our communities. We have invested significant funds into helping prevent crime through programs like the youth gang prevention fund and the national crime prevention strategy.

In addition, we are taking real action to strengthen our borders. These borders are strengthened to stem the flood of illegally smuggled firearms from the United States. Our efforts to crack down on this illegal activity have taken many forms, including the deployment of integrated border enforcement teams at strategic points along the border, as well as making key improvements to border infrastructure, which improves the way that travellers are screened.

I have listened to the opposition question what lessons we have learned from the tragic events of Polytechnique and Dawson College if we scrap the long gun registry.

I will quote Darrell Scott whose daughter Rachel was killed at Columbine, the first high school tragedy shootings in 1999, as he testified before a House judiciary subcommittee on firearms legislation. He stated:

In the days that followed the Columbine tragedy, I was amazed at how quickly fingers began to be pointed at groups such as the NRA. I am not a member of the NRA. I am not a hunter. I do not even own a gun. I am not here to represent or defend the NRA - because I don't believe that they are responsible for my daughters death.

Mr. Scott went on to state:

And when something as terrible...politicians immediately look for a scapegoat such as the NRA. They immediately seek to pass more restrictive laws that continue to erode away our personal and private liberties. We do not need more restrictive laws.

He continued:

Eric and Dylan would not have been stopped by metal detectors. No amount of gun laws can stop someone who spends months planning this type of massacre. The real villain lies within our OWN hearts. Political posturing and restrictive legislation are not the answers. The young people of our nation hold the key.

In light of what we know about the long gun registry, our government is making the responsible choice. We know the long gun registry is wasteful. We know it is ineffective against real crime. We know that we have a strong mandate from Canadians to pursue law and order measures that really work. That is why our government is

choosing to deliver on our promise to scrap the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry once and for all.

The long gun registry has cost Canadian taxpayers an exorbitant amount of money. We hear from front-line police officers that the long gun registry is not reliable, is full of errors and has done nothing to help the officers who it was meant to protect.

There is no statistic showing us that the long gun registry has had any impact in terms of saving lives or deterring individuals from committing violent gun-related crimes.

This is a matter of common sense and our government has a strong mandate to deliver measures that work and that protect law-abiding Canadians. The long gun registry does neither.

I ask all hon. members to vote according to the facts and end the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry today.

• (1235)

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a law is only good if it accomplishes what it sets out to do. Clearly, the firearms registry does not do that. I say that as a former police officer. I have never gone to the scene of a crime and seen a circumstance where the registry would have had an effect. I have looked down the barrel of a gun the wrong way. The registry is not an asset.

I have been at a number of domestic calls where one must always assume the worst. One can never prepare. The registry has never helped. I have said that to many of my colleagues across the country and they have repeated that. Yet, I hear the opposition members bringing a general testament that it is of assistance.

Could the hon. minister give us the exact circumstances she has heard from the opposition that shows the many occasions where it has been effective? Are there any?

Hon. Lynne Yelich: No, Mr. Speaker. I know that some members were elected on that issue going way back in time, including in Saskatchewan where a Liberal MP has not been elected since the long gun registry in 1993, aside from the member for Wascana. However, he does not listen to his constituents, as we well know. I guess Regina did not send him for that reason.

That is reason I quoted the father who lost his daughter in the Columbine tragedy, one of the worst tragedies. What he said hits home. It is what is in people's hearts. It is the person behind the gun who will commit the murder, not the gun. The gun involved in the Dawson shooting was registered and it did not make a difference. Those young people are dead today because of the person behind the gun, not because of the gun.

[Translation]

Mrs. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as we all know, and as we have repeated over and over again on this side of the House, the Quebec provincial government and the National Assembly have unanimously decided that they want to keep the data from the current Canadian firearms registry. The Conservative member for Kootenay—Columbia even said earlier today that if the provinces want to create their own firearms registries, they could simply go ahead and do so.

I wonder if my hon. colleague across the floor could share her thoughts on that. Destroying the registry, only for the provinces to turn around and create new ones, that is fine, but the government does not want to share the existing data. Why would the government make the provinces spend more money, when they are simply asking for the data from the firearms registry?

[English]

Hon. Lynne Yelich: Actually, Mr. Speaker, this legislation has nothing to do with penalizing provinces. We are ending the long gun registry. The long gun registry is a database of long guns. If the provinces really wanted that data, they should have collected it themselves and helped in this debate, instead of challenging us for that information. They can perhaps take care of that themselves.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is ironic that the member is saying that the provinces should have collected that data themselves. The data already exists and there is an opportunity to ensure that the provinces that believe in this registry can obtain it. There was a comment earlier by a colleague on the other side who used to be a police officer. I can tell the House that not every police officer supports his point of view.

How many times did the minister's office need to do interventions to assist people with the gun registry? I can say that in the three years I have been the MP in my riding, I have had four. That does not account for wanting to get rid of the registry. I am not talking about complaints to get rid of the registry. I am talking about complaints where people needed her help in order to address issues of the gun registry.

Hon. Lynne Yelich: Mr. Speaker, I guess I should not have said the provinces. They can do what they want. We want to end the gun registry and that is what we are doing. I am not interested in pursuing that part of the argument.

On how many calls have come into my office, when we were elected, I would venture to say that 99.9% of my votes were what mandated us to end the gun registry alone. That is how many calls I received. People told us to get rid of the gun registry now that we had a majority government. They said that that they had sent us to Ottawa to get rid of it and that if we did not, they would start their own party and get rid of it.

● (1240)

Mrs. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as members are aware, I am rising to speak to Bill C-19, an act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act.

In this very emotional debate, we have had members from all sides of the House rise and quote from either families of victims, police officers, or from other organizations that are for or against the

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registry. I think that the kind of debate we have heard in the House emphasizes how divisive this particular issue is in this country. No matter which side of the issue, people have passion when speaking to their beliefs on the matter.

I will address one aspect of that belief. I come from the riding of Nanaimo—Cowichan, a very beautiful riding, but I think it epitomizes the divide in this country around this particular issue.

My riding of Nanaimo—Cowichan is an urban-rural riding and members can imagine the kind of discussion that has taken place there on the registry. I would have one group of constituents come before me to say that I absolutely must vote to get rid of the gun registry. Then I would have an equally passionate group of people coming from exactly the opposing point of view. However, I have heard members in the House say that the reason they are here in the House is because people in their riding voted to send them here based on their position on the gun registry, either pro or con.

I think many of us sometimes face very difficult decisions when we have a riding that is just not that clear cut. What do we do? I have had people, whether they voted for or against me, say that I have to represent their views here in the House. With an individual who says that to me, I always raise this question. There are roughly 127,000 people who live in my riding, it is 4,000-plus square kilometres and I could conceivably have 127,000 different points of view on any particular issue. So how do I best represent my constituents?

It is incumbent upon us, when we are talking about representing our constituents, to look at the country as a whole. Right now we have before us an issue that is dividing our country. It is dividing the urban versus the rural. It is pitting the hunters and farmers against some of the city dwellers and sometimes against people whose families have suffered as a result of gun violence.

It would be far more useful if we could talk about gun control rather than the gun registry. If we want to keep our communities, family members and officers safe, that may be the best way to tackle it. However, instead of having that conversation, we are having a deeply divisive conversation about the gun registry.

I want to quote the late Jack Layton. Jack, in this House and in other places, has said that one of the roles of a national leader is to look for ways to bridge those divides in our country. One of the roles of a national leader is to take those deeply divisive issues and ask where we can find common ground so that we are not beating up on each other over issues.

Years ago when I was doing work on conflict resolution and mediation, one of the things that some of the professors used to say about this issue is to be hard on the problem and soft on the people. However, I find in this House that we are being very hard on the people, but not dealing with the problem.

I want to read into the record parts of a speech that Jack gave on August 20, 2010. Jack said:

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I've heard from countless gun-owners who say the registry treats them like criminals. Discounts their way of life...their regional roots. I've heard from Canadians who hate what the registry seems to represent — another city-driven idea that forgot rural reality. I've spoken to First Nations hunters who resent hearing they should "just get over it" and register their rifles. They talk about respect, and treaty rights, and slippery slopes.

The concerns of rural, northern and aboriginal Canadians are real and honest. But I've also heard from countless citizens, equally impassioned, who take a different view. Emergency Room doctors, victim service workers, police officers and their unions, parents, teachers, Members of Parliament, ordinary women & men in cities like Montreal, Winnipeg, and Vancouver.

Many agree that the way the registry was implemented was deeply flawed, but they ask a compelling question: Shouldn't we Canadians do anything in our power that might reduce gun violence? Stopping gun violence has been a priority for rural and urban Canadians. There is no good reason why we shouldn't be able to build solutions that bring us together, but that sense of shared purpose had been the silent victim of the gun registry debate.

● (1245)

He goes on and, I think, very ably outlines in that speech the very difficult decision facing our country, but I only have 10 minutes.

I know from my own riding that, although the gun registry has been an issue either for or against, is not the number one issue that people come in to my riding office to talk about. They want to know how come they cannot get their employment insurance claim cheque because of delays in processing. They want to know where is the national housing strategy because my riding has a situation where there are very few rental units that have been built over the last 10, 15, 20 years. They want to know what is happening with health care because they cannot get a family doctor. They want to know what is happening with the roads and all of those other day-to-day things that people face in my riding of Nanaimo—Cowichan. The gun registry is not the number one issue that they say we should be spending our time and energy in this House debating.

Now, Jack and the New Democrats did have some proposals around this deeply divisive issue. This included things like decriminalizing first time non-registration of long guns and making a one time offence a non-criminal ticket, enshrining in legislation that gun owners will never be charged for registration, preventing the release of identifying information about gun owners except to protect public safety by court order or by law, and creating a legal guarantee for aboriginal treaty rights.

I know that as a former aboriginal affairs critic I did hear many times from first nations about their concerns around the possible abrogation of treaty rights in this piece of gun registry legislation. I know the member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, myself and others in this House have talked very passionately about the need to consider aboriginal treaty rights in the context of gun registry or gun control, whichever way we are looking at it.

As in many pieces of legislation, there are often opportunities for unintended consequences. We have seen this in legislation that has been before this House before. I was talking earlier to a member of the press about the former voter identification registration, where the initial piece of legislation disenfranchised nearly a million Canadians because the House did not get it right. It did not do its due diligence.

An article in the November 1 *Toronto Star* begins with "Tory gun bill delists sniper rifles, semi-automatics". In here some concerns have been raised about some, one can imagine, unintended consequences of the bill because I am sure nobody would actually

want this to happen. I am going to read from the article about some of the weapons that are affected. It states:

They are all weapons that will soon be declassified under the Conservatives' bill to kill the long-gun registry and freed from binding controls that now see them listed with the RCMP-run database.

They fall under the class of "non-restricted" weapons and they are about to become unregistered. Restricted or prohibited firearms such automatic assault rifles, sawed-off shotguns or handguns are not affected by the bill and would remain under current controls.

But under Bill C-19, the law would no longer require a licensed gun owner to hold a registration certificate for "non-restricted" weapons.

It further states:

The [Coalition for Gun Control] is still analyzing the legislation. But in information sent to the Star, its researchers point out that under the Conservative bill the Ruger Mini-14, the .50-calibre sniper rifle...a sniper rifle that can pierce light armour from a distance of up to 1.5 km—and [another] Long Range Sniper Rifle, which can accurately hit a target 2 kilometres away will no longer require registration certificates.

I am sure most Canadians would not want this to happen. It would seem important that what we do is take a step back, think about the divisions that this is creating in our country, and think about what Canadians actually want when they are talking about gun registry versus gun control.

I would urge all members in this House to vote against the bill because the bill simply does not address some of the key issues that are facing our communities, our police officers, and families of victims of gun violence.

● (1250)

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, does the hon. member think there is any such thing as a law-abiding sniper? Because that is exactly what this legislation will create. The government goes on endlessly about criminalizing the activities of otherwise law-abiding citizens. Of course, this is a nonsense argument. The effect of the bill will be that we will now be able to have law-abiding snipers because they will not have to register their sniper rifles.

On a more serious note, the chief of police of Toronto, Bill Blair, has come out very vigorously in preserving this. I was in personal conversation with him and he sees it as simply a matter of officer safety, aside from all of the other benefits, that this is purely and simply a matter of officer safety. The officers use and rely on this registry. It gives them intelligence in advance of going into a situation where they may or may not know what the situation is.

I would be interested in the member's comments on both of those issues.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for those two very good questions. I ran out of time to quote from the *Star* article, but further on down in that article, dealing with issues around snipers, it pointed out that in the past businesses used to have to do the registration. Of course, that was done away with, with the long gun registry in 1995.

There is a quote here from the president of Quebec's municipal police federation. He said:

Without the long-gun registry, the government must re-establish the requirement that merchants keep records of gun purchasers, and the same requirement must be imposed upon gun owners who give, transfer or sell their firearms.

We are not doing away with some of the requirements. We still need an ability to find out who has these guns and when they may be used in an offence.

The other issue around officer safety is very interesting. The Conservatives, with their law and order agenda, are actually not looking for ways that they can continue to put in place measures that would support the safety and well-being of police officers in this country.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her impassioned speech. She spoke about what our previous leader, Jack Layton, had said in his speech. It really touches on the point that there are differing opinions and as members of Parliament our job is not to divide but to actually unite. So we need to do our research and we need to make a decision. Even in my riding, people are divided on this issue. It is not easy, but we have to look at their perspective.

There was a speech on the Conservative side a few minutes ago and during the speech the member talked about the NRA. I wonder if my colleague would like to comment on the fact that the Conservatives quote the NRA on certain issues.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, any of us who have done any travelling in the world, whether to the United States or other countries, recognize very quickly that Canada is a culturally different country. Therefore, when we start looking elsewhere for quotes and comments, this is really one of these cases where it should be a made in Canada solution. Because our country has evolved differently than the United States, we really do need to look for solutions that are going to respect the different provincial and territorial approaches to this, as well as first nations and Inuit rights, with their treaties. First nations and Inuit have been treated very differently in this country as well.

This is an issue that must be made in Canada. We must look to Canadians for a solution. We must look to rural and urban Canadians and first nations, Inuit and Métis. Therefore, I urge the government to withdraw this piece of legislation and go back to the drawing board.

• (12:55)

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to join in the debate on Bill C-19, Ending the Long-gun Registry Act. This is

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an important issue that has been very important in my riding of Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley.

Last fall I presented a petition before this House signed by thousands of members of my riding, all of whom wanted the government to scrap the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry. I also want to note that our office did a survey on this very issue within our riding, and again the constituents of Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley spoke loudly and clearly. Of the 2,600 people who responded to the survey, 2,200 said they wanted the long gun registry scrapped, so when I speak today, I feel I am honestly and fairly representing the views and wishes of my constituents.

I wonder if the hon. members across the floor who represent rural ridings can say the same. I will come back to that point a little later.

Let me tell members a bit about Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, the area that I am so proud to represent. It is a beautiful part of northern Nova Scotia. It is a rural riding; the largest community is 12,000 people. Families there have a wonderful tradition of enjoying Canada's outdoor heritage.

Members may know that as an educator by profession, I spent many years working to help young people become responsible citizens and lead healthy and rewarding lives. I am happy to say that thousands of young people in the riding enjoy hunting and fishing as part of healthy outdoor living. Being close to nature is one of the great benefits of living in the rural parts of our country, and those are also activities that families enjoy together as part of growing up in these rural communities.

That is one of the reasons that there is so much opposition to the long gun registry in communities that I represent. Law-abiding hunters, farmers and fishermen for whom responsible long gun ownership is the norm are being made to feel that there is some questionable aspect to their lifestyle simply because they own a firearm. They feel that they are being penalized for a way of life by a far-off threat of illegal handguns in urban areas. This is both wrong and unfair. It is something I hear about on a daily basis from those who live and work in my riding.

I also hear a great deal about the wastefulness of the long gun registry, something I have spoken about in the past and something I will continue to speak about in the future. As a Conservative and a taxpayer, I find the cost of the long gun registry to be unacceptable. When this measure was first introduced by the previous Liberal government, Canadians were told the cost would not be more than \$2 million; today we are looking at costs as high as \$2 billion. Canadians have been made to bear the cost of this bureaucratic exercise, yet it delivers no tangible benefits to prevent crime or help front-line officer safety. In fact, there is a fundamental disconnect between what the long gun registry was created to do and what it actually does.

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We know the long gun registry was set up with the intention of preventing gun crime, yet we know that by their very nature, criminals do not follow the rule of law, and they certainly do not register their firearms. In the years during which it has been in effect, the long gun registry has failed to do anything to prevent criminals from picking up a firearm and using it in a crime. It has no preventative capacity whatsoever. Despite hearing many of my hon. colleagues across the floor express their belief that the long gun registry saves lives, I do not believe we have been presented with any evidence that it helps in this manner.

The result over the years has been a large, wasteful and ineffective exercise that has done nothing to prevent crimes but has done a great deal to burden law-abiding hunters, farmers and sport shooters. It is bad policy, which is why our government is moving to scrap the long gun registry once and for all.

Let me be clear about what Bill C-19 would do and what it would not do.

The ending the long-gun registry act would remove the requirement for law-abiding hunters, farmers and sport shooters to register their unrestricted long guns. We would also ensure that the data collected as part of this registry would be destroyed and would not be available to create another long gun registry. Our government has made a commitment to scrap the long gun registry, and that is exactly what we are doing.

Throughout this debate, I have seen many of the members opposite try to confuse this issue. Many members have incorrectly suggested that by ending the long gun registry, we would somehow weaken gun control in Canada. There is simply no evidence to back up that claim. The long gun registry has nothing to do with licensing or the control of restricted and prohibited firearms. The rules and regulations surrounding those types of firearms would remain unchanged.

To close, let me remind the hon. members that November is the start of hunting season. For many years and throughout many hunting seasons, members of constituencies like mine have waited patiently for the end of the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry. Thousands of Canadians, both in my riding and across the country, are waiting for action from their members of Parliament on this issue. Specifically, they are waiting to see how members on both sides of the House will vote on this legislation.

● (1300)

That is why I am calling on members of the House who come from constituencies like mine to do the right thing and vote in support of Bill C-19. When we vote on this issue, I will be voting on behalf of the constituents of my riding. I have a responsibility to those who elected me and I hope that all other hon. members will respect those who elected them and do the same.

[Translation]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I very much appreciated the speech given by my colleague opposite, especially the part about the cost of the firearms registry. As everyone now knows, the firearms registry was originally supposed to cost only \$2 million. In the end, it cost \$2 billion to create. I am not sure if my colleague opposite is aware, but today the firearms

registry costs about 10¢ a day per voter. That is less than the cost of a cup of coffee a day to keep it. If he wants to scrap it, as he is so fond of saying, it will cost us another \$2 billion.

Does the member not think this would be a lot more expensive than just keeping the information so the provinces can reuse it?

[English]

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Mr. Speaker, we have heard a lot of rhetoric before on the cost of the long gun registry. When the long gun registry was created, the creator of it was Allan Rock. He said:

Let us not hear that the registration system will cost us \$100 per firearm. Let us not hear that it is a prelude to confiscation by the government of hunting rifles and shotguns. Let us not contend that it will cost \$1.5 billion to put in place. That is the way to distort the discussion. That is the way to frighten people.

Allan Rock said it would cost \$2 million, and when the accusation that it would cost \$1.5 billion was levelled against him, he said that was ridiculous.

He was right; it did not cost \$1.5 billion. It cost the Canadian taxpayers \$2 billion.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am glad that the hon. member was speaking about waste. I would like him to comment on this Conservative waste: ongoing \$2 billion subsidy to the oil patch; \$2 billion for the G8 summit for a fake lake, gazebos, sidewalks that go nowhere and an arena that was never used; \$3 billion of stimulus money put into the Treasury Board for discretionary funds; and the Conservatives spent \$130 million of taxpayers' money to advertise.

Could the hon. member comment on this type of waste?

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Mr. Speaker, our focus as a government is on jobs and growth. We have invested millions and billions of dollars from one end of the country to the other to make sure that we escaped from the largest recession since the Great Depression. I stand in favour of those investments because they have led Canada to be the strongest nation in the world when it comes to debt to GDP ratio.

Before the NDP members criticize this government for the way we are tackling jobs and growth in this country, they should first look at some of their own initiatives, such as increasing taxes on job creators across this country. Their tax increases would destroy the future of this economy.

On the long gun registry, all the member has to do is ask the NDP government of Manitoba, which stands solidly behind the elimination of the long gun registry.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Mr. Speaker, I am glad that the hon. member mentioned Manitoba. With this legislation, Conservatives are going to destroy all of the data. Why would the government not let provinces like Quebec and Manitoba use that data to form their own gun registry, instead of wasting \$2 billion to destroy it? That is real tax waste.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Mr. Speaker, many people in this country believe that the long gun registry is only a step in the path to eliminate private ownership of firearms. Many people believe that. Let me quote what Allan Rock said on April 25, 1994: "I came to Ottawa with a firm belief that the only people in this country who should have guns are police officers and soldiers".

That is what the long gun registry could lead to. That is what many people in this country fear.

Also, for people in rural parts of this nation, Liberal Senator Sharon Carstairs said that registering hunting rifles is the first step to social re-engineering of Canadians.

Thanks very much. We do not need someone like her to re-engineer us in rural parts of this country.

● (1305)

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very interested in Bill C-19, an act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act.

The NDP recognizes that there were improvements to be made to the firearms registry from the moment it was implemented. In fact, our party has proposed a number of changes to improve this registry and make it a more effective tool that does not interfere with the rights of the public. What is more, our late leader, Jack Layton, introduced a very positive proposal, which included decriminalizing the failure to register one's firearm when it was the first failure to do so. His proposal also allowed the benefits of this registration program to be maintained. As my colleague mentioned a little earlier today, the registration fees would also be dropped under this proposal.

Instead of bringing people together, finding solutions, bridging the divides between the various positions and trying to reach a general consensus, as advocated by the NDP, the Conservatives are once again imposing their vision and their ideology just for the sake of keeping their election promises, without any consideration for the thoughts and concerns of all the groups in society that are saying they are against abolishing the firearms registry. The Conservatives are moving ahead without listening and without considering the countless police officers who use the firearms registry every day in every region of Canada.

The Conservatives prefer to take a step backwards, waste taxpayers' money and erase any trace of progress. The Conservatives want to eliminate all the data at all costs, regardless of how useful it is and regardless of the estimated 2,100 lives that have been saved because of this registry.

In Quebec, we recognize the importance of such a registry in protecting the public and reducing violence against women—women who live in abusive situations under constant threat.

After the Polytechnique massacre and the Dawson College violence—we bring this up every day because these events left their mark on Quebec—women's groups said that it was important to keep the gun registry to better track licence holders and to help police locate criminals, even murderers. This is unfortunately still the reality in 2011. The gun registry is a tool that allows us to verify

the licences of gun owners and to run checks on these people. If the government abolishes the registry, it will remove the obligation to verify information about licence holders or those who buy and sell guns, which runs the risk of weakening the usefulness of a licence.

In addition—we have said this a number of times but it bears repeating—the National Assembly of Quebec, the elected officials who represent all Quebecers, last week voted unanimously to keep part of the gun registry.

However, the Conservatives are ignoring the will of Quebec's National Assembly and are telling Quebec that if it wants to create its own registry it should go ahead, but without the federal data. Once again, it is a question of public safety. The Conservatives want to tax the provinces as much as they can.

Instead of wasting the money of Quebec taxpayers, who funded the registry, why not act in good faith, in a positive and constructive manner, and give them access to the data and the information, which, I would remind members, saves lives. Furthermore, on the issue of public safety, the Conservatives are really contradicting themselves with this bill.

For example, in my riding of Beauharnois—Salaberry, which is on the U.S.-Ontario border, we know that there is definitely a problem with the trafficking of guns, drugs and cigarettes. An increasing number of issues that people find to be worrisome and alarming are being raised.

● (1310)

Just last Friday, I met with the mayor of Dundee, who spoke to me about a growing problem: for the past year at least, landowners have been feeling more and more intimidated every day because RCMP and Sûreté du Québec police surveillance has diminished. An excellent pilot project was implemented west of the Franklin border crossing in Venise-en-Québec. However, between Franklin and Dundee, there is a section of the border where surveillance is lacking and crime is on the rise.

I have a very real example. Last winter, the home of a person who was not involved in crime in any way was set on fire by criminal groups that have not yet been identified. People are terrified by the idea that other homes may also be burned down. People are being intimidated but they do not dare to report the crimes that are being committed around them, on their property or against them.

In June, the Minister of Public Safety himself went to Dundee to determine the extent of the problem. He met with the mayor of Dundee. He assessed the situation and acknowledged that action needed to be taken to make the community safer. Yet to date, the mayor of Dundee has not received any information and the government has not followed up on the situation.

People want an increased police presence to increase surveillance, whether it be ground or maritime surveillance, as my riding borders Lake St. Francis.

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Could RCMP officers not form a task force in co-operation with the Ontario Provincial Police, police on the Akwesasne Mohawk reserve and the Sûreté du Québec? Is it too much to ask the Conservative government to make sure that these areas are safe? The various jurisdictions could work together to break up these crime networks, which have not stopped growing since security was increased west of the Franklin border crossing.

With respect to the Franklin border post, I will say the same thing. The post was closed in April. This is a factor that reduces public safety in my riding, given that the customs officers who watched over that post no longer work there. So there is no longer any surveillance at that location on the Canadian side. On the American side, however, they have strengthened security. Is what has happened not absurd? We have tried to work with the Conservatives to reinstate this border crossing, but have been unsuccessful to date. We still have hope.

Instead of spending time tearing down what we have managed to build up over the years, why not think about concrete solutions to concrete problems of public safety that are increasingly of concern not just for the people in my riding, but also for people in Ontario and Akwesasne and the Americans?

There is a glaring problem in terms of the firearms registry and the borders. The Canada Border Services Agency does not exchange information with the people in charge of the registry when it comes to long arms imported under a licence to operate a business. As a result, some firearms have turned up on the black market.

My time is running short, so I would like to give two very quick examples. In British Columbia in 2007 an RCMP report explained how some firearms had turned up on the black market. Some film production companies had claimed that they needed firearms in their films and so were allowed to bring the weapons in legally. The weapons then turned up on the black market, sold to the highest bidder.

The second example is something that happened as recently as October 25, last week. The RCMP had to conduct raids at gun shops because some replica AK-47s had been imported from China in shipments of goods where they were recorded as being mere toys. The RCMP then realized that the firearms could easily be converted and that by changing no more than two or three parts they would become deadly weapons. So they all had to be recalled. It is unbelievable that this could have happened.

• (1315)

I will conclude by saying that the registry is consulted by police more than 17,000 times a day. Is this useful information? I think it is. There is no consensus on this bill and it must be rejected, so that it can be reworked to take all opinions into consideration.

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the hon. member on her presentation. In Quebec, particularly in rural communities—the hon. member for Alfred-Pellan spoke about this earlier—many of our ridings include both rural and urban areas. This is also true of ridings elsewhere in Canada.

Why is it important to listen to advocacy groups for women, aboriginal communities, police forces and the RCMP who all want

to keep the firearms registry? Why is it important to listen to these groups?

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his very relevant question. I live in a riding that is both rural and urban and that is home to the Mohawk community of Akwesasne. Demands in my riding vary greatly. However, everyone agrees that public safety is of the utmost importance. Yes, there are hunters and people who use firearms responsibly, but we need closer monitoring for no other reason than to prevent crime. A statistic from 2009 shows that 7,000 registration certificates were revoked for public safety reasons. Thus, the firearms registry is useful.

[*English*]

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no, that is not the issue I am going to talk about today.

I am not sure if the member is aware of how much impact this issue has had on people who are no longer in the House of Commons. There is a good reason for that. The reason is that there is broad support for getting rid of the long gun registry. It does not work. It does not make our society any safer. It has nothing to do with crime.

The member made a comment and I am quite shocked that kind of comment is still being made by members of the opposition. The comment was that public safety is the number one issue and we need better gun control to avoid crime. The member has to know that criminals certainly do not register their firearms. If criminals have registered firearms, they are highly unlikely to register the ones they use to commit crimes.

The argument does not make any sense. Why would the member still make an argument like that? It is quite shocking, really.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, I will make no apologies for the argument I am making about the firearms registry. If all weapons were registered, it would allow us to monitor firearms more closely and there would be fewer weapons on the black market and thus fewer untraceable weapons readily available to criminals. We need greater control to prevent situations like the one that occurred in British Columbia in 2007—as mentioned in the RCMP report—and the one that occurred on October 25 with the replica AK-47s imported from China from happening again. We need all these tools so that police can intervene in a correct and appropriate manner.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the hon. member for Beauharnois—Salaberry. Is the government standing up for victims by doing what it is doing right now? We know that a number of victims' groups want to keep the firearms registry. By acting this way, is this government living up to its claims that it always stands up for victims?

• (1320)

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his question. On the contrary, I think that with this bill, the Conservatives are simply trying to keep a promise without any consideration for the thoughts and concerns of the victims' groups, the police forces, the public, or for public safety. This is truly an unwillingness to listen and to work together with all parties to advance matters in a constructive manner.

[English]

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to speak in favour of the ending the long gun registry bill.

It has been nearly 17 years since the previous Liberal government imposed the wasteful, ineffective long gun registry on Canadians, which is ironic.

In March 2008, I was the first active RCMP officer to be elected to the House of Commons. It is also ironic that I was also the first Conservative first nations member to be elected to the House of Commons.

My riding is entirely in northern Saskatchewan, and is actually two-thirds of the province. Obviously, many of the communities are very remote. As a result, firearms are a way of life where I come from, and in my daily life in the RCMP, I saw firearms being used in a legal way. There are those who make their living as farmers and use a shotgun to protect their crops and livestock, and there are those who are first nations, Métis or non-aboriginal who use a rifle to hunt for sustenance. However, these facts seem to have evaded the previous Liberal government.

When the long gun registry was established as part of Bill C-68, it was done with the intention of protecting Canadians from gun crime.

I had five or six years' service when the gun registry was being imposed and I recall listening to my fellow RCMP members, the constables, the corporals and the sergeants. I heard them say that the long gun registry would be ineffective, that \$2 million would not be substantial enough and that there would be lots of cost overruns. Obviously, it was ill conceived as its fundamental focus is on those who are predisposed to follow laws, regulations and rules.

It is abundantly clear that adding needless red tape to every long gun owned by a person in Meadow Lake, La Ronge and La Loche does nothing to stop criminals from getting their hands on guns in cities. The real way to ensure that we can keep our streets and communities safe is through smart investments in crime prevention and establishing tough, effective sentences for those who break the law.

It reminds me of one incident that took place. I was on patrol in a first nations community and saw someone drive a pickup truck down a road, turn to an approach and then turn its lights off. I proceeded to follow. Upon entering the residential lot, I saw an offender pointing a rifle at a residence with individuals inside. I exited the vehicle and he nearly turned his gun on me.

It is kind of ironic that less than a year later we had to investigate a murder in which this individual, in a rage of anger, had thrown his young infant son against a door frame. If the proper sentencing had

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been in place to deal with this offender, I believe that this offence would not have been committed and one more young child would have become an adult.

Through these measures we can ensure that crimes do not happen in the first place and that dangerous criminals, who insist on harming others, are kept behind bars where they belong.

Over the past five years our government has taken concrete steps in both these areas. Then as now, we are committed to keeping Canadians safe and not increasing needless bureaucracy.

Frankly, front-line police officers agree that the long gun registry is not a tool that is useful in day to day operations.

I served as an RCMP sergeant. I can say from experience that decisions that my colleagues and I made regarding our safety were not based on information we obtained from the long gun registry. Every complaint was always treated as a firearm complaint. Even when we were serving a summons or a subpoena, we treated the residence as if there were a firearm inside and took the necessary precautions.

Members opposite, specifically the NDP member for York South—Weston, frequently suggest that eliminating the long gun registry will lead to the death of police officers.

• (1325)

I have another personal experience. At 9:25 p.m. on July 7, 2006, in Spiritwood, Saskatchewan, I was on duty and on patrol. A domestic assault occurred in which the mother and sister were assaulted by Curt Dagenais. Subsequently, a pursuit ensued in which chase was given down remote grid roads. As a result, two members were shot and mortally wounded. The members' names were Marc Bourdages and Robin Cameron. One week later, they died from their wounds. This is something I remember every day. Was the gun registered? Yes.

I think there is more of an underlying issue there. The individual had continuous run-ins with people in authority, from transport police to the RCMP to anyone in authority. The individual also faked his own death.

Under our omnibus crime bill, if that individual were charged today, we would still have those two members here working and serving our country.

Any time police officers go into a potentially volatile situation, they do so knowing that there is always a chance someone will have a firearm or other weapon. There was a time when I would leave home knowing the risks of putting on the uniform and knowing that it may be the last time I see my family.

A list of all weapons, not to mention a list that is well-known to be inaccurate, is not a reliable tool. To say that a vote to scrap the long gun registry is a vote against the safety of police officers is simply not accurate.

I want to be clear. The NDP and the Liberals claim to be standing up for law enforcement, when, in reality, it is only our government that has consistently delivered to our men and women in uniform.

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Every time a measure comes to the House to give police the tools they need to do their jobs, be it tougher laws, better investments or more funding, police officers from coast to coast to coast count on the opposition to obstruct, delay or oppose them, which is why I find it strange that members opposite are all of a sudden best friends of those in uniform.

When I look at our Conservative caucus, I see 11 members who have all served our country. We have all taken the risks to serve our country. At one point or another, all of us have had to make a decision to go into volatile situations where our lives were deeply at risk.

I was a police officer and I did not find the long gun registry to be a useful tool to prevent crime. Last Friday, I sat with six members from Prince Albert and all of them said that we should get rid of the long gun registry.

First, as a police officer, I can tell members of this House that the long gun registry is not a tool to prevent crime or to keep Canadians safe. In fact, the Canadian Police Association stated:

The Government received a clear mandate from the last election to proceed with their proposed changes to the long-gun registry.

We respect the message that voters have sent on this issue.

...any changes would have minimal impact on public safety.

We look forward to continuing to work with the Minister to find effective tools and resources to keep guns off our streets....

We're quite satisfied with the efforts this government has made to work on behalf of front-line police officers, specifically with respect to the comprehensive justice legislation that has been a priority since the last election.

I challenge any member who votes to keep a \$2 billion boondoggle to show me a single statistic that empirically proves we are safer with these measures.

Second, the long gun registry targets the wrong people, the northerners, the first nations, the Métis and law-abiding duck hunters.

I call on all members of this House to support this very important legislation and to ensure its speedy passage.

• (1330)

[Translation]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I greatly appreciated the hon. member's speech, especially when he spoke about the police officers in his region who told him that no one was using the registry and that it was absolutely useless. In my province, police officers consult the registry every time they are called to intervene at a home or elsewhere.

I would like to ask the hon. member why this government is so set on not wanting to transfer the firearms registry data to Quebec, when the National Assembly is unanimous in asking it to do so and police officers use that data every time they answer a call. I would like to hear what he has to say about that.

[English]

Mr. Rob Clarke: Mr. Speaker, the one issue that stands out is the privacy issue. It is a federally run system and to provide it to another jurisdiction would be wrong.

The member talked about executing duties. Every time I stopped a vehicle on the side of the road, I would run a licence plate. However, I would be out of the vehicle before I received that information. I would not know whether that person had a weapon. Therefore, every complaint must be treated as if a weapon is involved, whether it be a long gun, a restricted weapon or a knife. It is always about officer safety and using common sense.

[Translation]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre: Mr. Speaker, I want to come back to the fact that the National Assembly of Quebec has asked for the firearms registry data. I find there is a great deal of stubbornness on the other side of the House on this. The Conservatives say they were elected on the promise to abolish the firearms registry and they add that if the provinces want to create a firearms registry, then they can go ahead. We know full well that the Canadian firearms registry cost the Canadian taxpayers \$2 billion. Our constituents are saying they paid for this registry and they want to keep the data.

I would like to know what the hon. member is thinking of telling these constituents who want to get their money's worth and who, in Quebec for example, want to recover the data.

[English]

Mr. Rob Clarke: Mr. Speaker, the data is three years old, only seven million guns were registered and it cost over \$2 billion.

My colleague, speaking on behalf of Quebec, wants to take information on western Canadians, Ontarians and east coast people for Quebec to use. That will not happen. If Quebec really wants it, it can come up with \$2 billion and pay for the registry itself.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, being a front-line officer, my colleague can speak with a degree of certainty and experience that no one else in the House can claim, unless they are former police officers.

Would the member expand on why front-line officers say that they cannot depend on the data in the long gun registry? When police officers go on a call and the registry indicates that there are two firearms in that residence, do those officers actually believe there are only two firearms? What is the procedure when officers go into a situation and want to ensure that all weapons, whether they are firearms, knives or bats, are cleared out of the situation? Could my colleague please explain that for us?

• (1335)

Mr. Rob Clarke: Mr. Speaker, it comes down to basic simple investigational tools. A lot of the information on the registry is three years old. If a person has one or two guns, there is no doubt that he or she will have four, five, six or seven guns. I have experienced a situation where a person had over 100 guns. He was a gun collector and many of those weapons were registered.

It also comes down to common sense investigations. Officers make neighbourhood inquiries. They ask the family. They gather all the information, collect the data and then make the proper judgment from there. It is always about officer safety and about looking after communities and their safety.

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Police officers always treat every complaint as if a weapon is involved. That is where some of the mistakes are made. We call it tombstone courage. Some officers are being harmed because they trust this data when it is in default.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was never a police officer but I was the justice critic for a number of years in the province of Manitoba. This provided me with the opportunity to meet with numerous police officers over the years. The gun registry was one of many issues on which we had a great deal of dialogue because it has been around for a good number of years.

This is where it is a bit unbalanced, if I can put it that way, in terms of a Conservative member who proclaims that he was an officer of the law and that he does not support the gun registry.

Mr. David Wilks: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The member for Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River was a member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. He is not proclaiming to be a police officer.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I think the issue is a matter of debate. It is not really a point of order. We will go back to the member for Winnipeg North.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I detect a little sensitivity on this issue. The reality of the situation is that there is no unanimous opinion coming from our police forces, whether it is the RCMP or the local police.

Many would argue that a vast majority of people serving in our police forces, our RCMP included, support the gun registry. If members were to talk to many of them, they would hear that this is just one of many tools that they have access to. It does not necessarily mean that they do not consider whether there will be a gun when they approach a door. They will always take that into consideration. However, it is one of many tools that the police have been using now for a number of years.

I have found that the government, more than most governments that I have witnessed in my tenure as an elected official, tends to exaggerate the truth or maybe be a little tricky in terms of what it says to the public. A good example of that is the previous speaker talking about over \$2 billion. We all know that is completely fictitious. It is not true. However, the Conservatives continue to play on that issue even though they know it is not true. Our national auditor has indicated that is not the case. The Conservatives try to give the opinion that the cost of the gun registry is hundreds of millions of dollars and huge expenses going forward from today. Again, we know that is not true. We know that the annual cost is somewhere between \$2 million to \$4 million.

Providing straightforward information and facts is missing from this debate. I would suggest to members that it is something that is often missing from debate when we talk about government legislation that is before us, and it is somewhat shameful. If we were actually listening to what people had to say about the gun registry, not a small percentage, members would find that the information quite often somewhat contradicts what members are saying inside this chamber in regard to this particular bill.

• (1340)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. I would just remind hon. members, in the course of debate in respect to these subjects, one has to be somewhat careful that one does not impute motive with respect to the truthfulness of subjects that are mentioned in the House. I know the hon. member is somewhat close to that and I would just caution him to take some care in the way in which these ideas are expressed.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, many individuals, such as members of the NRA, often try to take advantage by using misinformation in order to espouse a specific side.

We need to treat issues of this nature fairly. When police officers and members of police chief associations, emergency response teams, paramedics, ambulance attendants, firefighters and first-time responders from across the country say that there is great value to the gun registry, at the very least we need to listen and respect that.

Part of respecting that is to ensure there are actual facts brought to the debate. Facts have been lacking and I would encourage that we look at what is the most responsible thing to do in this debate.

I have risen in regard to the cost factor for the province of Quebec. I have raised that because it speaks volumes in terms of to what degree the government has chosen to sabotage and completely kill the gun registry. Whether it is good or bad is truly irrelevant to the government. It has chosen to kill it at any cost.

I believe the Quebec example is a great example to use in terms of how the government sometimes fails to recognize common sense. I will explain.

The government has said that it wants nothing to do with the gun registry and is killing it. The registry has a database. The Conservatives say how much they believe it costs. In reality, we know it is substantially less. However, the data bank is there and is in place. They want to destroy the data bank. They want to hit the delete button. They want the shredders working overtime to ensure there is nothing out there to show there is a gun that is registered in Canada. They are determined to do that.

The province of Quebec is saying that the government should wait. People in the province believe that having a gun registry makes sense. They want to listen to what members of our law enforcement agencies and many different advocates, such as women's groups and other groups, are saying. They are saying that it has true value. In fact, it is one of the many tools that law enforcement officers can access. They recognize its value and they want to have it. Therefore, they contacted the government and asked to have the information in that data bank, which makes sense.

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The government came up with some lame excuse. It said that it could not provide the data bank due to privacy. Prior to that it said that it did not care if it were provincially or federally administered it wanted nothing to do with it. Therefore, the Conservatives are prepared to waste tens of millions of dollars. They would rather have the province of Quebec re-establish the data bank at a substantial cost. By forcing Quebec to do that, the government is causing it to use valuable tax dollars that could be spent on community policing, an outreach office, capital infrastructure programs to have youth more involved in positive activities or a litany of other initiatives.

Whether one is for or against the gun registry, anyone looking at that would say that is plain dumb and a stupid policy of the government.

• (1345)

The government should be looking at what it is saying. When it talks about building federal-provincial relationships, how can it sit at the table and say that it does not want to give provinces the information in the data bank and that they have to create their own, causing the provincial government to spend tens of millions of dollars when it is in fact not necessary?

The bottom line is the gun registry has had a lot of proponents over the years. If the government is going to do something with it, as we continue to go through the debate, in a very limited way I must say, it should at least respect the facts and stop trying to feed misinformation which we know is just not true. It does not add to the debate. If anything, it adds to the anger and resentment that government cannot be honest.

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member opposite. He stressed the importance of basing a decision on fact. I admit that in this place it really is rare when there is a lot of fact in debate. If the member actually believes this decision should be based on fact, there is one fact, and that is there is no evidence that one life has been saved because of the long gun registry being in place. That is a fact.

Beyond that, I admit there is not a lot of fact and much of it is perspective. For example, with regard to the Wheat Board debate, there are farmers who believe the monopoly will help to protect them. It is not necessarily based on fact but perspective.

The member should pay attention to what happened to more than a dozen MPs in the last election, who lost because they did not support getting rid of the long gun registry. I would encourage the member to consider that as he goes ahead with this debate. Members do not necessarily base a position on whether they will be re-elected or not, but the reason—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I am sure other hon. members may have questions and we have to get to them.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I would welcome a debate based on facts. It would be nice to hear the government provide the rationale, not the ideological reason, for why it wants to get rid of it. It has been said that there were several hundred suicides. There were presentations in committee with regard to the value of the gun registry and the impact it had on the number of suicides that could have taken place.

I do not want to claim to be an expert, because I am far from it, but I listen to what people have to say and respect the need to make good decisions based on facts. I do not believe the government has made a good decision based on facts in this case.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we keep hearing from the government side that MPs in the opposition were defeated because of the gun registry. I predicted, after the last vote on the gun registry, that the Conservatives would lose a lot of Quebec MPs, especially women MPs. In the House today there are no more Conservative women MPs from Quebec.

Could the hon. member for Winnipeg North comment on the fact that there are less Conservative Quebec MPs and that the numbers went up for MPs who supported the gun registry in the last election? Could he explain that to me?

• (1350)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, it is an interesting observation about the province of Quebec. I would suggest that there is a wide variety of reasons why people choose to vote for the Conservatives, the Liberals or New Democrats. For a number of reasons, all sorts of factors, the numbers came in the way they did. Did the gun registry play a role? I suspect it might have played a role in some constituencies and in others not as much. At the end of the day, I look at it this way. As opposed to basing a decision strictly on electoral success, we should base decisions on what makes sense and fact.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the members across the way wants to talk about evidence, I sat in on the hearings and there was only one person, the police chief from Calgary, who said that maybe this should be a provincial responsibility and that there should be no cost. That was the only thing we heard against the gun registry. Every other group, whether police chiefs, police association of Canada, mental health experts, one after another said that it served a purpose. They all supported the gun registry.

Does he believe the government is doing a great disservice when it says that this will not stop gangland gun offences. No one said it would, but it would stop domestics, it would have an impact on suicide, it—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for Winnipeg North, a 30 second response only please.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, my colleague has raised an excellent issue. At the end of the day, Canadians want to see a government that will be tough on the causes of crime. We want to prevent crimes from happening. The gun registry has been something on which the government has long been too focused. If it really wants to do Canadians a service, it should listen to what the stakeholders actually have to say and start to take action so we can prevent some of these crimes from taking place in the first place.

There are so many other things we could be doing and I suggest the government would do well by listening to my colleague.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to stand and add my voice to the debate on this important piece of legislation, the ending of the long-gun registry act.

Today we are speaking on behalf of Canadians in rural and remote parts of our country who have been unfairly targeted for the simple and legal act of owning a long gun. I want to talk to that issue briefly.

I grew up in a city and probably would not have understood this issue, but in my mid-twenties I moved to a rural community, and my understanding became much more robust. I hit a deer on the road, and a hunter was able to put the deer down. My children played, but there were cougars in the area, and we came to count on these tools. I also came to appreciate how important this issue was for the farmers and hunters.

Who are these Canadians? They are our friends and family members. They are responsible, law-abiding individuals who use rifles and shotguns to legally hunt for sport or sustenance or both. They are athletes who participate in sharpshooting events, such as biathlons and skeet shooting, and who are internationally recognized for their impressive conditioning and skills. They are hard-working farmers protecting their livestock and their livelihood in the same manner as those who worked to settle in the west did for generations before us. For many of these individuals, their rifles and shotguns are simply the everyday tools of their trade.

Each of these firearm owners has had to undergo proper steps to obtain a firearm licence before acquiring their gun. The wasteful and ineffective long gun registry simply adds another layer of red tape to this process. It also carries with it the uncomfortable stigma that makes these long gun owners feel like criminals. In fact, it is putting more burden onto legal long gun owners while having zero impact on criminals.

Are we really to believe that violent criminals are going to register their long guns and firearms? It is not likely. Therefore, we are left to draw the obvious conclusion: the long gun registry is a waste of time and money.

I will take a moment to say that our government is not against investing in effective measures that take the bite out of crime. It is entirely the opposite. For example, we are proud of our efforts to augment and strengthen our police forces. We have committed \$400 million for the police officer recruitment fund to assist provinces and territories in hiring additional officers and in addressing their unique public safety priorities and policing needs. This is a significant federal contribution to policing costs over a five-year period, and it is helping the provinces and territories in their efforts to recruit new police officers and make their communities safer. In this way, since just 2009, our government has contributed to the addition of over 1,800 police officers across Canada.

We are also investing in policing through other partnerships with the provinces and territories and the first nations policing program. To help encourage new recruits, our government has also provided crucial funding for RCMP cadet allowances and for improvement to

infrastructure at the RCMP training academy, depot division. These are all worthy investments in our front-line law enforcement.

Another key piece on reducing crime, and another area worthy of investment, is our effort to prevent crime before it happens. This includes supporting community-based crime prevention programs that help at-risk youth make smart choices and avoid criminal activities. Last year alone, our government funded 160 community-based crime prevention programs through the national crime prevention strategy, which had an impact on the lives of nearly 10,000 youth at risk.

We are proud that the next phase of Canada's economic action plan includes \$7.5 million annually towards the youth gang prevention fund. These are investments that are making a tangible difference in the lives of at-risk youth. We are proud to support efforts to steer them in the right direction. Every youth who decides to go to school instead of joining a gang has taken a positive step in the direction of success instead of violence and guns.

We make no apologies for these investments because we know that the cost of crime to victims and to society is far higher. According to the Department of Justice, the cost of crime, including everything from property damage to the emotional impact on families and victims, totals nearly \$100 billion every year. In the face of this statistic, we stand firmly behind our decision to invest in effective crime prevention and appropriate reforms to law and justice sectors.

• (1355)

What we will not do is allow our scarce resources to continue to be funnelled into an ineffective long gun registry. We will not focus our efforts on laws that are not having an impact on reducing gun crime.

We know that most homicides committed in Canada do not involve rifles or shotguns. We know that in 2006 alone, three times as many homicide victims were killed with handguns than with rifles or shotguns. In 2009, we saw that two-thirds of homicides committed with a firearm were carried out with handguns, not rifles or shotguns.

It is obvious that the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry is not worth the billions of dollars already spent on it. It is nothing more than a bureaucratic database with questionable benefits. In a time of a fragile economic recovery, that money could be diverted to more effective programs that prevent gun crime and protect our police officers. That money could better be utilized in our efforts to strengthen our border enforcement and crack down on illegal smuggling of firearms across the U.S. border, which is where most of the firearms that are illegally smuggled into Canada come from. To those who argue that ending the long gun registry will weaken our gun control legislation, I reply that it does nothing of the kind; rather, it will free up resources to reinvest in programs that actually work.

Statements by Members

We will also ensure that all data currently contained in the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry is destroyed. We will not stand for the creation of backdoor registries.

Equally as important as what the bill will do is what it will not do: it will not remove the requirements for Canadians to have a licence in order to use long guns; it will not undo the requirement to pass a background check and complete a safety training course. In addition, Bill C-19 will not make changes to the current requirement for owners of restricted and prohibited firearms to register these firearms through the Canadian firearms program.

These are reasonable and fair measures. I therefore call on all hon. members to support the speedy passage of Bill C-19.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

● (1400)

[English]

INSURANCE INDUSTRY

Mr. Peter Braid (Kitchener—Waterloo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today members of the Canadian Life and Health Insurance Association are in Ottawa to meet with parliamentarians to discuss critical issues such as pensions and health care. These issues impact the lives of all Canadians.

In my riding Equitable Life, Sun Life, Manulife and FaithLife Financial are major employers and boost our local economy. They are also strong and dynamic partners that give back to the community through volunteer and public service contributions.

Across Canada the insurance industry plays a vital role in our economy and our society, providing financial protection and security to over 26 million Canadians. They also provide leadership on social issues, demonstrating a commitment to enhancing the well-being of families and communities.

The Canadian life and health insurance industry is a solid and successful partner in our strong financial system, and I thank it for contributing to our prosperity.

[Translation]

BENOIT SIMARD

Mr. Claude Patry (Jonquière—Alma, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I had the honour to officially present the Commander-in-Chief Unit Commendation insignia to a very courageous man, Corporal Benoit Simard.

The unit commendation is awarded in recognition of an extraordinary deed or activity performed in extremely hazardous circumstances. The 1st Battalion Royal 22e Régiment Battle Group, of which Corporal Simard was a member, received this commendation for opening the airport in the besieged city of Sarajevo in July 1992. Surrounded by warring parties, with fire coming from all directions, the members of the battle group were able to help flights bringing humanitarian assistance land so that essential aid could be distributed to the people of Sarajevo affected by the war.

The battle group's extraordinary efforts also contributed to promoting the United Nations as a vital force in maintaining peace and security throughout the world.

I am both pleased and proud to pay tribute today to the bravery of Corporal Benoit Simard.

[English]

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, over 17 years ago the government of the day was promoting gun control in the form of Bill C-68.

After receiving a challenge from my constituents to look at the facts, I realized that the legislation did nothing to stop crime and protect Canadians.

To date, the long gun registry has cost taxpayers over \$1 billion. This money could have been, and should have been, used to crack down on real criminals, not law-abiding Canadians. The long gun registry unfairly targets farmers, hunters and sport shooters, not criminals.

I am very proud to be part of a government that, after working for so long on this important issue, is making good on its commitment to end the long gun registry. Bill C-19 would reward those law-abiding citizens who have been patient and supportive. This legislation is a step in the right direction as we bring a bit more common sense to our laws.

We thank the thousands of Canadians who took the time to share their stories and their opinions that the registry should be scrapped. It has been a long haul, but in the end they have made a difference. Bill C-19 is proof of that.

FOOD BANKS

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Food Banks Canada released its annual hunger count today. It is clear that the economic recovery has left far too many Canadians behind. Food bank usage has gone up 26% since 2008. Each month, 851,000 people use a food bank. Of those, 322,000 are kids.

Even people with jobs are having difficulty. One in five working families uses a food bank.

In my own province of Prince Edward Island, poverty and food bank usage are also on the rise.

We can do better. We need to invest in affordable housing so that Canadians do not have to decide between paying the rent and feeding their families. We need to modernize employment insurance to better support older workers who have lost permanent jobs. We can no longer pretend that all is well. We need a national poverty reduction strategy, as suggested by both the Senate and a House study last year. We need government to show some leadership, because so far, we have seen little.

ASSOCIATION OF CONSULTING ENGINEERING COMPANIES

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, members of Parliament on both sides of the House, today I rise to greet the Association of Consulting Engineering Companies of Canada, which is here today in Ottawa for the annual Parliament Hill Day and Awards Gala. It will be presenting awards for the best engineering projects in Canada over the past year to some outstanding engineers.

Whether it is a bridge or a building, if people have been on it or in it, it is probably designed by one of the finest engineers in world. These are Canadian engineers. Tonight they will be honouring the best of the best.

It is absolutely wonderful that we in Canada have some of the best professional engineers in the entire country. Those in the past built this country. Those today are building this country. What they are asking is that all parliamentarians work together to improve the infrastructure fund past 2014 so that these engineers can do what they do best—that is, build the best country in the entire world.

● (1405)

WINNIPEG CHINESE COMMUNITY

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Winnipeg South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today the Winnipeg Chinese Cultural and Community Centre is celebrating an exciting event. The community centre will be unveiling significant renovations to its kitchen and boardroom facilities, as well as officially launching a commemorative book entitled *Celebrating 100 Years—A Remarkable Achievement*.

This book was commissioned by the community centre in 2009 to commemorate Winnipeg's Chinatown's centennial year. After much hard work by the dedicated late editor, Philip Chang, and a group of community authors, it is finally off to the press.

Renovations to the centre will ensure that it remains a vibrant cornerstone of the Chinese community. By investing in projects like this, our government is following through on the commitment to fully implement our infrastructure stimulus package. These investments are creating jobs now, when they are needed most, and are positioning Canada for long-term growth and prosperity.

I ask the House to join me in applauding the community centre on its achievements and hard work in support of Winnipeg's vibrant Chinese community.

VETERANS

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on this first day of the eleventh month, as we prepare our hearts for the eleventh hour of its eleventh day, I would like to share a story of remembrance.

Ray Hoffman is 87 years old and lives in Cochrane in my riding of Wild Rose. He was still a teen when he went overseas to defend Canadian freedoms in World War II. Mr. Hoffman was an infantry machine gunner with the Calgary Highlanders. Once, while running supplies to the forward positions his driver was killed in a German

ambush that he survived by shooting his way out. He was in the Highlanders' final battle of the second world war in Oldenburg on VE Day in 1945.

Last month, Mr. Hoffman returned for the first time to tour the battlefields where he so valiantly fought. He revisited the places that he remembers, where his friends and comrades died.

This month and at all times, our debt to veterans like Ray Hoffman demands that Canadians remember the great sacrifices made for our freedoms.

PRICE OF PEACE

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we pause today to reflect on the price of peace. Since Confederation, two million Canadians have served in uniform, 115,000 have paid with their lives, and hundreds of thousands have suffered life-long grievous injuries to self and soul.

In Ortona's Piazza del Plebiscito is a poignant memorial of two soldiers, one lying dead and one bent over in grief, created by Ottawa artist Robert Surette.

Entitled "The Price of Peace", it speaks of the supreme toll in the "Stalingrad of Italy", the battle for Ortona, and for all who have faced their soul in the finality of the theatre of war.

Flowers are laid daily by citizens who know too well the price paid by Canada for their peace. Fourteen hundred sons of Canada rest in nearby Moro River Canadian War Cemetery, never to return home.

The price of peace is paid in war. We ought never to forget those that serve, those who truly pay the price of peace.

[Translation]

ALGERIAN WAR

Mr. Tarik Brahmi (Saint-Jean, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is with great emotion that I rise today to commemorate the date of November 1, 1954. Today, in many countries, including Canada, Algerians are remembering and paying tribute to fallen heroes. November 1 is not a celebration so much as the commemoration of a day that marked the beginning of the last Algerian war, which was a heartbreaking conflict that would last eight years.

A few minutes ago, at the Algerian embassy, two colleagues and I took a moment and paused to remember. Canadians of Algerian origin are proud to be Canadian, proud to be part of the cultural mosaic we live in and proud of their contribution to Canada. They are also grateful to those who welcomed them. In the election on May 2, 2011, Canadians chose three Algerian-Canadians to represent them in this House.

I invite all members to join me in recognizing this important date in Algeria's history.

Statements by Members

• (1410)

[English]

ABORIGINAL VETERANS

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Saint Boniface, CPC): Mr. Speaker, aboriginal Canadians have demonstrated time and again their great service and sacrifice for our country through their participation in Canada's military, particularly during times of conflict.

As Veterans' Week approaches, we are reminded of the many aboriginal Canadians, including my grandmother, who joined in the fight to protect the values and freedoms we enjoy today. First nations, Inuit, Métis and non-status aboriginal people served in the first and second world wars and the Korean War.

That proud tradition of service continues today. Their courage, sacrifices and accomplishments are a source of pride for their families, their communities and all Canadians.

This Veterans' Week, we honour their legacy. This Veterans' Week, we remember.

PROSTATE CANCER

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today is the first day of movember.

It is the day that many of our significant others dread as thousands of men across Canada grow a mo. Movember is a campaign in which men grow moustaches throughout November to raise awareness about prostate cancer and to raise funds for research.

This year the New De-mo-crats are looking forward to doing their part in changing the face of men's health. So every time we see a man with a mo, we should think about a man in our lives and encourage him to get his prostate checked.

Last year New De-mo-crats raised close to \$16,000 for movember and this year we will surpass that number.

I encourage every MP to give, and I suggest \$228.11 which represents the 22nd day of the 8th month of 2011, the day we lost one of the most iconic mo's in this House. It is a way for us to pay tribute to Jack Layton, who fought this disease.

With Jack's spirit among us, let us change the face of men's health, so we no longer lose the faces of men we know and love.

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Hon. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is hard to address all the glaring factual inaccuracies that the NDP has been spewing recently in the *Toronto Star*, but let me try.

The NDP has claimed that we are delisting and declassifying firearms. This is completely false. Bill C-19 does not address the process in which firearms are classified as non-restricted.

The process in which firearms are determined to be non-registered was laid out by the previous Liberal government of 1995. Our government has made no changes to that process since coming into office.

Let me be clear, the ending of the long gun registry act does exactly what that title suggests. We are putting an end to the wasteful, ineffective system that has not prevented one single crime. We promised to end the long gun registry and rather than flip-flopping like the NDP, we are keeping our promise to Canadians.

I would like to call on the NDP to stop its false and misleading statements, get on board and support Bill C-19 when it comes to a vote right here in just a few short hours.

ATLANTIC AGRICULTURAL HALL OF FAME

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize William Cairns of Freetown, Prince Edward Island on his recent induction into the Atlantic Agricultural Hall of Fame.

Mr. Cairns has made outstanding contributions to the Island farming community, among them: member of Junior Farmers of P.E. I., vice-president of the Federation of Agriculture, member of Dunk River Dairy Company, and is the lone surviving attendee who pushed ahead with Amalgamated Dairies Limited.

In 1952 Mr. Cairns became the first Islander to be accepted as a Nuffield Scholar, which fosters agriculture leadership through international study. As a result, he became a Canadian pioneer in adapting innovations for the dairy industry.

Mr. Cairns and his son continue to operate Willscott Farm Ltd., in the family since 1852, a seventh generation farm.

Our sincere congratulations to Mr. Cairns. We thank him for his lifelong dedication to agriculture, to P.E.I., and to Canada.

INDIA

Mr. Parm Gill (Brampton—Springdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 27 years ago today, following the assassination of Indira Gandhi, thousands of innocent Sikh men, women and children were mercilessly killed in the streets of Delhi and other parts of India.

During this violence, at great risk to themselves, Hindus, Muslims, Christians and others sheltered and rescued their Sikh neighbours from the mobs.

As Prime Minister Singh stated in his apology on behalf of the nation in 2005, "what took place in 1984 is the negation of the concept of nationhood enshrined in our Constitution...I bow my head in shame that such a thing took place".

Last year during his trip to Canada, Prime Minister Singh also stated that the perpetrators of these crimes need to be brought to justice, and I agree.

Like Canada, India is a highly pluralistic society known for its tolerance and democratic values. These shared values and our strong people-to-people bonds underpin a strong and vibrant relationship between our two countries.

● (1415)

[Translation]

ASBESTOS INDUSTRY

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a growing number of people oppose the fact that this government, which is completely out of touch with reality, continues to support Canada's deadly asbestos industry. Scientists, miners and ordinary Canadians are calling for a formal ban on asbestos. Even more important is the dissension that exists within the governing party. A former Conservative cabinet minister has come out strongly against the government's position. Chuck Strahl said that, for thousands of Canadians, working with asbestos in the past has set them on a deadly course, without their even knowing it.

We know that Mr. Strahl is not the only Conservative to take this point of view. Any Conservative members who oppose asbestos have an opportunity here today to support the NDP motion to ban the substance. The Prime Minister should not be muzzling his members and forcing them to protect asbestos, thereby damaging Canada's reputation even further.

WHITE-COLLAR CRIME

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are concerned about crime, and that is why they gave the government a strong mandate to make our streets and our communities safe. Today, Bill C-21, the Standing up for Victims of White Collar Crime Act, comes into effect.

The effects of fraud resulting from such crimes as Ponzi schemes, insider trading and accounting fraud are devastating. Bill C-21 will ensure that fraudsters are given sentences in keeping with the severity of their crimes, including a mandatory minimum sentence of two years for fraud over \$1 million. The bill adds new aggravating factors that the court may apply to increase sentences, such as the impact on victims and the fraudster's conduct.

We are determined to do everything in our power to ensure that fraudsters face the consequences of their actions and that victims are taken seriously by the judicial system.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are seeing some absurd situations as a result of the Conservatives' irresponsibility when it comes to the firearms registry. For example, owners will no longer be required to register the semi-automatic Ruger Mini-14. The Ruger Mini-14 is the weapon that

was used in Norway this past summer. It is also the weapon that was used at the École Polytechnique.

If the Prime Minister were a police officer, I would think that before walking into a building, he would want to know whether there was a Ruger Mini-14 inside.

Why destroy all the data? Why endanger our police officers?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the firearms classification system has been around for a long time. We are following the process that was set out a long time ago. There are no changes to that in our bill.

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we know where the Conservatives stand. They would rather destroy the data and put the police and the public at risk, but we do not understand why.

Say that in a house there is an armour-piercing gun, a Steyr HS .50, an L115A3 long-range rifle and a TAR-21 assault rifle, but the police do not know because the Prime Minister decided to destroy that data.

Abdicating his responsibilities is one thing, but why refuse to give the provinces the existing data?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government committed to eliminating the ineffective long gun registry and we do not intend to help other levels of government create registries.

● (1420)

[English]

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let me quote the Conservatives' Associate Minister of National Defence:

A very obvious concern to us in policing is that I want my police officers to know where there are firearms when they respond to calls, especially those that very often entail dangerous situations.

Does the Prime Minister agree that the semi-automatic weapon used at École Polytechnique is dangerous?

Does he agree with his Associate Minister of National Defence that it is an obvious concern for our police officers to know where these guns are when they respond to a dangerous situation?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Once again, Mr. Speaker, the system for the classification of firearms was established long ago. The government follows the process. It is not changed in any way by the bill.

The government has been clear. It favours the elimination of the long gun registry. The government will not do anything to support the creation of a registry by other levels of government.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, under the legislation, semi-automatics and armour-piercing sniper rifles, even those capable of dropping a target two kilometres away, will no longer need to be registered. The government is making it easier for these dangerous firearms to fall into the wrong hands.

The government likes to talk about hunters, but the last time I checked, hunters were not going after armoured targets one and one-half kilometres away.

Oral Questions

How is the government's decision to remove the last line of defence against these high-powered rifles in the interest of public safety?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate the members opposite are relying on a very misleading *Toronto Star* story for their research.

Claims that our government has changed the process for classification of firearms are simply not correct. In fact, the current process was put in place by the former Liberal government and that process continues.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, they are required to be registered now.

The Ruger Mini-14 semi-automatic rifle was the weapon used by Marc Lepine in Canada's worst-ever mass shooting in Montreal. Now the government wants to remove restrictions from this weapon and others like it.

As if trashing years of valuable registry records in spite of victims' pleas was not enough, now the government is removing controls over high-powered rifles.

Why is the government making it harder to track who has these dangerous weapons? Why has it not learned from the past?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is very unfortunate the member engages in that type of fearmongering that is misleading. He knows it is misleading.

Claims that our government has changed the process for classification of firearms are simply not correct. The fact is that the current process was put in place by the former Liberal government. That process is continuing.

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in light of the alarming economic news with respect to the decision on the part of the government of Greece to call a referendum and the impact that is having on uncertainty in the world, I wonder if the Prime Minister would reconsider the government's refusal so far to do two very simple things.

First, will the Prime Minister postpone the increase in employment insurance premiums which will cost at least \$1.2 billion to the economy? Second, will he make sure that all of the tax credits which are being put forward by the government become refundable so that the lowest income Canadians, the poorest Canadians, could take advantage of those tax credits?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, obviously, the events in Europe over the past couple of days have once again increased uncertainty and have highlighted the fragility that does exist in the global economy.

That is why this government has an economic action plan and has measures before the House that would give important tax breaks to families and to small businesses to help people out and to help create jobs. I would encourage the Liberal Party to stop finding excuses and instead to support those important initiatives.

[Translation]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we urge the Prime Minister to examine the impact of these measures on the poorest families. There are families who do not earn enough money to pay taxes. Why not give these families the same benefits as families that pay taxes? That is the situation.

Employment insurance premiums result in job losses. I am not the only one to think that; so does the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. Why does the government not change its strategy in order to give the poorest families a chance?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, every time this government proposes tax cuts for families and SMEs to Parliament, the Liberal Party does not support them. That is an irresponsible position. There are other measures before this Parliament. I encourage the Liberal Party to change its position and support these measures, which are important for our families and our businesses.

[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, perhaps the Prime Minister has not heard us. We are encouraging the Prime Minister to go further with respect to providing some degree of stability for ordinary Canadians going through a difficult time. That is exactly what we are proposing. I do not know why the Prime Minister is being so intensely ideological in refusing to get to grips on this thing because it is so important.

Speaking of ideology, when is the Prime Minister going to come to grips with the true cost of the F-35 contract? At the same time as he is talking about cuts elsewhere in the economy, why does he not do something to ensure that there is real fairness and real competition with a contract that everybody knows the price is—

The Speaker: Order. The right hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the only ideological position here is that of the Liberal Party which opposes every single tax break this government brings forward for families, which opposes every single tax break this government brings forward for small- and medium-size business in this country, and which in some bizarre proposal is now suggesting that we would be somehow helping the economy by cancelling aerospace contracts with 65 Canadian companies.

The government has no intention of doing any of those irresponsible things. We call on the Liberal Party to start to support the Canadian economy.

POVERTY

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we learned today just how badly the government is failing families. A whopping 851,000 Canadians used food banks in March 2011 alone, the second highest number ever. The Conservatives boast about their recession fighting skills, but food bank use has jumped 26% since 2008. Fighting a recession means helping families recover, not just giving big corporations tax breaks.

Why is the government letting struggling families rely on food banks? Why is it leaving them out in the cold?

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we all know that tackling this problem requires a plan, and we have a plan.

The best way to fight poverty is to get Canadians working. The economic action plan is doing just that by helping grow our economy and by creating 650,000 net new jobs since July 2009.

Every action we are taking is to help Canadians and their families become independent and help them to contribute to the economy and to their communities.

Whether it be the working income tax benefit or helping lower income families get over the welfare wall, we have a plan and we are implementing it.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are talking about working families who have jobs, but they still cannot afford to pay their bills and feed their kids. Food banks say that working families—I am talking working families here—are being left to struggle thanks to part-time low-wage work. The IMF and Mark Carney both say we should be worried about our economy. How much more proof does the government need?

When will the government stop relying on misleading job numbers and come up with a real plan to kickstart job creation for families in need?

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I just mentioned, the best way to fight poverty is to get Canadians working. The economic action plan is doing exactly that with over 650,000 net new jobs since July 2009. Every action we are taking is to help Canadian families, allow them to become independent and help them to contribute to the economy and their communities.

Why are the members of the NDP not voting for these initiatives to make sure that Canadians can have a successful job and a successful future?

[Translation]

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that it is difficult to live with a disability, physical or intellectual. It seriously compromises a person's ability to make a living. Canada has signed the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This government must fulfill its commitment and take real action to help persons with disabilities.

Oral Questions

The government has clear responsibilities towards all Canadians. What does it intend to do to discharge those responsibilities?

[English]

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no government has done more to support Canadians with disabilities than our Conservative government has done. Our government is removing barriers to participation in the economy and communities because the participation of Canadians with disabilities in our economy means that they are successful and we as a nation are successful.

• (1430)

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is a dramatic increase in the number of people visiting food banks for help. One in seven of them is someone with a disability. People with disabilities are not being hired, including in the public service. According to the president of the Public Service Commission, the situation just keeps getting worse.

Why will the government not do more to fix this embarrassing situation and encourage the hiring of people living with disabilities?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we thank the president of the Public Service Commission for her work. Certainly we see that some of the measures we put in place are indeed working in terms of the diversity of the public service workforce and ensuring that it is a robust public service that is reflective of our community. We will continue to work in that regard.

SENIORS

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the guaranteed income supplement was put in place 40 years ago to address seniors' poverty in Canada, but because of the government's failure to keep up with the times, seniors are falling behind. Costs are rising on everything from food to home heating. Once again, seniors are being left out in the cold. We learned today that the number of seniors using food banks has escalated over the past decade.

What is the government's plan to help impoverished Canadian seniors?

Hon. Alice Wong (Minister of State (Seniors), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will take no lesson from an opposition party which has voted against all of our measures to help seniors. Canada's seniors have—

Oral Questions

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Minister of State has the floor.

Hon. Alice Wong: Mr. Speaker, I will take no lesson from the opposition party which has voted against all of our measures on behalf of seniors.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, of course we voted against it because the government's so-called plan left too many seniors at the food banks' doors.

We could act on seniors' poverty right now. New Democrats have put forward a practical, affordable plan to increase the GIS and lift every senior in this country out of poverty. We have the blueprint. All the government has to do is act.

Could the government explain its inaction on seniors' poverty?

Hon. Alice Wong (Minister of State (Seniors), CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadian retirement security is a priority of the government. That is why our government continues to take strong action to support seniors. Since 2006 the government has provided billions in annual tax relief for seniors and pensioners, removed hundreds of thousands of seniors from the tax rolls completely, introduced the largest GIS increase in a quarter century and made significant investments in affordable housing for low income seniors.

* * *

[Translation]

POVERTY

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since 2008, the number of Quebecers turning to food banks has jumped by 22%. Poverty is affecting an increasing number of people, but the government continues to turn a blind eye. The Conservatives are so out of touch with reality that they chose to put an end to government stimulus measures. That is completely unacceptable.

What real steps will the government take to stimulate the economy and create jobs?

[English]

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I feel a bit like I am in the movie *Groundhog Day*. I am up again to say exactly the same thing: the best way to fight poverty is to get Canadians working. The economic action plan has created 650,000 net new jobs since July 2009.

The best way to fight poverty is not the NDP's approach of increasing taxes; it is about providing people with jobs.

• (1435)

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we keep asking the same questions because the government does not understand.

More than 60% of the Quebecers who use food banks have exhausted all of their resources and are now living on social assistance. They are stretched to the limit, but the government keeps saying that all is well.

What will this government do to give them a hand up? What is the government waiting for to help them find affordable housing and return to work?

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will try to say it again, once and for all, so that the NDP really understands what we have done to reduce the tax burden on families.

We proposed a new children's arts tax credit, but the NDP voted against it. We proposed a new family caregiver tax credit. What did the NDP do? They voted against it. We proposed a new and improved medical expense tax credit. What did they do? They voted against it. The list goes on.

[English]

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government has to stop hiding in gopher holes. Food bank use is up 80% since 2008 in our northern communities, and that does not even tell the whole story. Families in many of our remote communities do not even have access to food banks. We are entering another cold winter. Why is the government allowing northern families to be left behind? When will it create an anti-poverty strategy that helps northerners who cannot afford to feed their families?

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us go through some of the things that this government has put forward that the NDP has voted against: the working income tax benefit, to help make work pay and help low-income families get over the welfare wall; tax cuts, which mean over a million low-income Canadians do not pay income taxes at all anymore; enhancing the national child benefit, and the child tax benefit. These are all things we have put forward as a government to help Canadian families, and the NDP has voted against them all.

* * *

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, open democracy allows for proper debate and differing opinions. First the Conservative government ignored the farmer-held plebiscite favouring the single desk, then it refused to hold its own plebiscite, then it limited debate in the House on Bill C-18 to three days. Now the Conservative-dominated committee is giving only three short evenings for consideration of the death of this iconic institution and small farms across the Prairies.

Conservatives closed their minds and they closed the doors. Why is the government closing opportunities for farmers to be heard?

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the committee met last night and agreed that it would meet tonight. It is going to meet tomorrow night and the night after. We are going to put 16 hours of meetings into this one bill, and I think most Canadians would find that to be adequate.

Farmers in western Canada need certainty. We are not sure why opposition members continue to stand in the way of their having certainty for marketing their grain next year. We would ask them to join with us and support Bill C-18. Let us strengthen the western Canadian economy together.

JUSTICE

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in his testimony today Quebec justice minister Jean-Marc Fournier regretted that the government, in its Youth Criminal Justice Act, proposed the incarceration model—this as opposed to the rehabilitation model, which has brought about the lowest recidivism rate in Canada.

Will the Minister of Justice be open to revisiting the bill and incorporating the amendments that justice minister Jean-Marc Fournier proposed, but which are not now part of the bill, which regrettably promises greater cost, more incarceration and less justice?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, certainly we have made a number of modifications to that bill. I invite hon. members to continue their study of it and to have a look at them. These are very reasonable. The bill balances rehabilitation with the legitimate interest of protecting the public. I think we strike that balance and I hope the hon. member would allow the committee to continue to do its good work.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Jean-Marc Fournier, who speaks on behalf of Quebec, the National Assembly of Quebec, the Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse, and the Association des centres jeunesse du Québec have said loud and clear that they do not want this automatic imprisonment system. They have also said that Quebec is not prepared to pay for it.

Given that the Minister of Public Safety misled the House when he said that all the provinces support this bill, what is the government waiting for to scrap the bill and do its homework?

● (1440)

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I heard the hon. member and I find it very difficult. This bill targets some of the most dangerous criminals and Canadians, meaning the people who sexually exploit children and the people in the business of drug trafficking.

I have to say we have had wonderful support from across this country. I notice, for instance, that Leger Marketing recently

Oral Questions

published a survey showing that the majority of Quebecers think criminals should serve sentences that reflect the severity of their crimes. On that count, we are completely on board with Quebecers. We agree with them.

OMAR KHADR

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier-Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a year ago the Conservative government made a clear commitment to respect the agreement between Omar Khadr and the U.S. government. It promised to bring him back this year to face justice in Canada. Now the government is going back on its word and saying it could take up to 18 months if the permit is returned at all.

Why is the government misleading our allies and retreating on its commitments?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Khadr, in fact, did face justice. He pleaded guilty to very serious crimes, including the murder of an American medic.

Decisions regarding the international transfer of offenders are made by me in my capacity as Minister of Public Safety, and at all times I put the safety of Canadians first. A decision will be made on this file, as on all applications, in due course.

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier-Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, clearly, the entire process currently under way in Guantanamo does not in any way comply with Canadian, American or international human rights standards. The Supreme Court's decision is clear and this House was clear: Omar Khadr must be returned home to face justice here.

Why is the government now questioning the repatriation of Omar Khadr?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have great faith in the rule of law, including the application of law by the United States supreme court. Mr. Khadr pleaded guilty to very serious crimes. He murdered an American medic and he voluntarily pleaded guilty to that charge.

Decisions made regarding the transfer of a criminal like Mr. Khadr are made under the International Transfer of Offenders Act, and my concern in that context is ensuring that public safety is maintained.

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the F-35 procurement plan is continuing on its downward spiral. Test flights for the F-35 in the United States could be grounded. Why? Because too many questions remain regarding safety. The F-35s are experiencing three times more in-flight problems than what is generally considered acceptable. We are not making this up; that is what the Pentagon's weapons officials have said.

Oral Questions

How can the minister still maintain that the F-35s are essential to the safety of our soldiers and our pilots, when our neighbours to the south are saying precisely the opposite?

[English]

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we believe in giving our brave men and women in uniform the best. With the F-35, we are getting the latest technology, some of which is still in the final development stage. As a result, we are giving Canadian industry the chance to become world leaders in manufacturing.

The opposition would prefer that we bought 30-year-old technology and not help Canadian industry lead the world. We disagree.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is not surprising that the Americans are following the example of Australia, Great Britain, the Netherlands and Denmark and ordering fewer F-35s than originally planned—55% fewer, to be exact.

All of those countries have reduced their orders—all but Canada. In spite of those facts, only this government continues to blindly support the F-35 program, which is going to cost us billions of dollars and is bound to fail.

When will the Minister of National Defence admit his mistake and launch a competitive public process?

• (1445)

[English]

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the only blindness around here is in those who are blind to the truth.

Let me clear on the choice being offered. Our government has decided that our men and women in uniform need the best technology available to get their job done and to keep them safe. We are doing this in a way that would give Canadian industry access to billions of dollars in work and create thousands of good jobs.

The opposition would slam the door on these contracts, throw those workers out of jobs and delay replacing the CF-18 by years, the very aircraft that is—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Kitchener—Waterloo.

* * *

TREASURY BOARD

Mr. Peter Braid (Kitchener—Waterloo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first the placeholder NDP leader, in a speech to her old public sector union, falsely claimed that unemployment was on the rise; in fact, Canada has created over 650,000 net new jobs since July 2009. Then, yesterday, the NDP made a wild accusation about this government's funding of the world-class Perimeter Institute in Waterloo using bogus data.

Could the minister of state for science and technology please update the House on the facts?

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for South-

ern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I share my colleague's concern on this issue. I again call on the NDP to check the public accounts and apologize to Canadians.

The Perimeter Institute is a world-leading centre for physics research. We support it because its discoveries will create the jobs of the future and strengthen our economy. That is what we are focused on.

I invite the NDP to get on side and join us to help Canadians. I invite it stop misleading Canadians, to stop these cheap political games, to apologize, and to let us move on with helping the country.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is strange to see that most of the time, science comes from this side of the House. I would like to point out to the President of the Treasury Board that the facts are simple, they are clear and, thanks to the NDP, they are now known.

The maximum spending authorized for the Perimeter Institute was \$50 million over five years. But in 2009-10 alone, according to government documents, we can see that spending was \$127 million, which is 10 times higher than the authorized annual spending, and the institute did not even receive the money.

The government is talking about a technical error. Are \$117 million technical errors common at the Treasury Board? Where did the money go?

[English]

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am quite sure that the member supports the kind of science that suggests pigs can fly.

The fact is that the NDP members are absolutely wrong. I invite them to check the public accounts, clear their facts with Canadians and apologize.

The Perimeter Institute is the world leader on theoretical physics. We support it because it leads to better jobs in the economy. I ask the NDP to stop purposely misleading the House and Canadians and to apologize.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we will never apologize for revealing errors and this government's mismanagement. It is pathetic to hear answers that are cheap shots designed to distract us from the facts. The Perimeter Institute does excellent work and we salute them. Personally, I love the study of particles and especially the superstring theory. However, what we are talking about here is that the President of the Treasury Board is responsible for estimates. We know that he has a talent for discreetly transferring money to secret funds.

What is he going to do to make sure these errors do not happen again?

[English]

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like, once again, to refer the NDP to the proper records. It is very simple. It is the public accounts for 2010 which show in fact that the NDP is misleading Canadians. I have the records here and I would be happy to table them at the end of today.

Even the Liberal MP for St. Paul's shares our concerns about the credibility of the House when she said, "When we make false accusations, and we're just not sure about this Perimeter Institute thing, we as parliamentarians lose...credibility."

* * *

● (1450)

ETHICS

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the latest release of emails about the Muskoka minister's involvement in the summit centre boondoggle, he made some disturbing comments about his intention to personally intervene in the spending process.

He wrote to the mayor, "I'm going through Treasury Board to flow funds....I should have the money for you within three weeks. I know your credit card is maxed."

This is not how it is supposed to be done. Where is the paper trail? Where were the bureaucrats? If this were really arm's length, why would he be sending BlackBerry messages promising to get cash in person?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at the height of the economic downturn, the government has supported some 23,000 public infrastructure projects in every corner of the country. The good news is that some 650,000 net new jobs have been created.

The Auditor General has looked at that initiative and, by and large, has been quite satisfied with it. When it comes to the G8 legacy fund, she has given some very thoughtful observations on how we can be more open and more transparent to Parliament, and we have completely accepted that advice.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have to say that, after 145 days of practice, big bad John has done a pretty good imitation of the Muskoka minister.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. I would ask the hon. member to refrain from using proper names and to stick to titles or ridings.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, the member has done, after 145 days, an excellent job of imitating the President of the Treasury Board but, unfortunately, it was the Muskoka minister who made the promise to get the money. It was the Muskoka minister who said that he would go around the spending processes.

If the government is to have any transparency and credibility left, I would ask the Minister of Foreign Affairs if he would push his colleague to stand up and take accountability for what he pulled off in Huntsville.

Oral Questions

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, such name calling is really beneath the member opposite. It has also hurt my feelings.

Hon. Tony Clement: Which is not easy to do.

Hon. John Baird: Which is not easy to do, as the President of the Treasury Board said.

I know the member for Timmins—James Bay will be excited that tomorrow at 3:30 he will finally be able to ask the President of the Treasury Board a lot of questions. I look forward as well to being there to support the government in any way I can. At 3:30 tomorrow we will see him there.

* * *

[Translation]

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, because of the decision to eliminate the gun registry, dangerous weapons will be circulating freely in our society. Owners of the powerful Ruger Mini-14, the weapon used by Marc Lépine and in Norway last summer, will not have to declare their weapons. The same applies to sniper rifles with bullets that can rip through armour from 1.5 kilometres away. These weapons are used for intimidation; they are not used by farmers.

Why are the Conservatives allowing these dangerous weapons to go unmonitored?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada is not getting rid of the licensing provisions. It is getting rid of the long gun registry. It is unfortunate that the member is relying on a very misleading Toronto *Star* story for his research.

Claims that the government has changed the process for the classification of firearms are simply not correct. The fact is that the current process was put in place by the member's government, the former Liberal government.

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ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, more than 40% of first nations homes without running water are located in St. Theresa Point, Wasagamack, Red Sucker Lake and Garden Hill. These are the very communities that were devastated by H1N1 and are still victims of the lack of federal leadership and commitment that leaves their communities at high risk to this day.

Will the minister take responsibility and immediately commit to provide running water and safe waste water management into the Island Lake community, and will the minister tell us when 100% of first nation homes will have safe running water and waste water management?

Oral Questions

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is strongly committed to the health and safety of all Canadians.

We have made important and strategic infrastructure investments to support first nations in operating their water systems and have committed to introducing legislation to ensure first nations have the same safe water that all other Canadians have.

We are working with Island Lake First Nations to address the needs of their community, including safe water.

* * *

● (1455)

[Translation]

AUDITOR GENERAL

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government's candidate for the position of Auditor General appeared in committee, and this has left several unanswered questions, particularly concerning the recruitment process. The selection criteria were very clear and although the Conservatives are trying to downplay the importance of the language criterion in its selection, the candidate chosen does not meet one of the essential requirements.

Can someone from this government confirm that the firm hired to find candidates was mandated to find a bilingual candidate, yes or no?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have already said in this House, the government looked for bilingual candidates and followed a very rigorous process. The best-qualified candidate was chosen. Mr. Ferguson said yesterday in committee that it was important to learn French.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is not an answer. We still do not know if the headhunting firm hired by this government was instructed to find a bilingual candidate. The job posting clearly lists the following requirement: proficiency in both official languages is essential. It became clear yesterday that this is not the case for the candidate proposed by the Conservatives.

My question for the government is simple: was the firm mandated to find a bilingual auditor general, yes or no? Respecting Canada's two official languages is not difficult. Yes or no?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I already said that the government did seek bilingual candidates, but at the end of the day, it is very important to have the most qualified candidate, the person with the most qualifications. And that is who we looked for.

[English]

Mr. Ferguson is supported by Ms. Fraser, the former Auditor General, by the Liberal leader in the province of New Brunswick and by the premier of the province of New Brunswick who have all dealt with him for years.

He is the right candidate for this position.

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the benefits of marketing freedom are already being enjoyed by western Canadian grain farmers.

Today, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food joined Rahr Malting in Alix, Alberta in introducing a \$6 million expansion to their malt plant which will increase or triple its storage capacity.

Would the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board please explain to this House the benefits of marketing freedom?

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is more exciting news of new investments just waiting for Bill C-18 to pass. Our government remains committed to giving western Canadian grain farmers the marketing freedom they deserve. As seen by today's announcement, an open market will attract investment, encourage innovation and create value-added jobs across western Canada.

What is more, this investment is comprised of 100% private money.

I call on the opposition to work with us to ensure the timely passage of Bill C-18 so western Canadian farmers can continue to build the Canadian economy.

* * *

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government took 13 months to even start acting on its own rail service review.

What it has started is yet another review, with no deadline for actually doing anything. This process is in never-never land, while shippers of everything from grain to forest products, minerals and chemicals continue to suffer costly sub-standard rail service.

The Conservatives quickly slapped closure on farmers. Why not a little closure on the railways, after 13 months of lost time and who knows how many more months yet to come? Why do the Conservatives side with the railways?

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, after 13 long years, Canadians called for closure on a Liberal government. One of the reasons they did that is that the Liberals refused to do anything with rail for 13 long years.

Our government has worked with great success with stakeholders to improve the supply chain of shipments for everyone involved in the economy, from the railways to marketing facilitators. With regard to the facilitator, an announcement will be made shortly.

• (1500)

[Translation]

VETERANS

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in four days, Pascal Lacoste will begin a hunger strike in front of the office of the Minister of Veterans Affairs. Mr. Lacoste served his country in Bosnia, but for the past 11 years, the department has completely abandoned him. Other veterans are adding their voices to his in order to denounce the red tape, the extremely long wait times and the lack of health specialists within the department.

Will all our veterans have to resort to such extreme tactics to get the minister's attention?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for her question.

When our brave soldiers are deployed to theatres of operation, such as Rwanda or Bosnia, they may suffer serious injuries. That is why we are implementing specific and effective programs and services that are based on the most recent scientific data. When we implemented improvements to the new veterans charter, it was specifically to help veterans who had the most serious injuries or illnesses.

As soon as I was made aware of this situation, I asked the officials in my department to take the necessary measures.

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Corneliu Chisu (Pickering—Scarborough East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this morning, our government became aware of reports that Mr. Ahmed, his wife, and two young children have been released from detention in Saudi Arabia.

We know that the Minister of State of Foreign Affairs and her consular team work incredibly hard to support Canadians in distress in the region, as they do across the globe.

Would the Minister of State of Foreign Affairs please tell this House about the excellent consular assistance provided to and on behalf of this family that assisted in their release?

Hon. Diane Ablonczy (Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas and Consular Affairs), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to once again be able to advise that other Canadians have now been released from detention abroad—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. minister of state has the floor.

Hon. Diane Ablonczy: Mr. Speaker, the Ahmed family has been freed in Saudi Arabia. I know it has been a very difficult time for the Ahmeds and for their concerned relatives here.

Canadian officials will continue to provide consular assistance and facilitate the Ahmeds return to Canada, as we have been doing since first learning of their situation.

Oral Questions

We once again thank our partners in Saudi Arabia for their cooperation in addressing our concerns with regard to Canadian citizens.

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Toronto families are worried about the dirty diesel train that will soon connect to Pearson airport.

While governments around the world invest in the future with cleaner electric trains, the government is leaving our biggest city in the past. Millions of travellers pass through Pearson airport every year. It is Canada's biggest airport. However, we should not be building 19th century transportation to get them where they need to go.

Why will the government not show some environmental leadership and help build an electric rail line to Toronto's airport?

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government has provided unprecedented amounts of funding for rail infrastructure throughout Canada.

If the member were really sincere about representing the people of Toronto, he would have stood and voted with this government on all our historic investments for infrastructure. Why does the member hate Toronto?

[Translation]

JUSTICE

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, by passing Bill C-10 to amend the Criminal Code, the Government of Canada will impose on the Quebec nation, on its territory, values that it rejects and will pass on the cost without Quebec having a say in the matter. In addition, today, Quebec's Minister of Justice declared that Quebec will refuse to foot the bill.

Does the Minister of Justice realize that this proves that the Quebec nation has no choice but to assume full control over its criminal laws, as any nation state would, to ensure that its values are reflected and it controls the cost of administering justice in its territory?

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate anything about fighting crime is very upsetting to what is left of the Bloc Québécois, but these pieces of legislation have been before Parliament and have been in the public realm for quite some time.

I am very pleased that since this government took office, we have increased our transfers to the provinces by 30%, \$2.4 billion in the last year alone. That is the right approach to this. We will continue to help the provinces in that regard.

Government Orders

● (1505)

*[Translation]***PRESENCE IN GALLERY**

The Speaker: I draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of Her Excellency Rose Francine Rogombé, Speaker of the Senate of the Gabonese Republic.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

* * *

*[English]***POINTS OF ORDER**

ORAL QUESTIONS

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the accurate research that clearly shows the Perimeter Institute received, and continues to receive, the funding that respects this government's promise. I would like to table this document to set the record straight. I would encourage the NDP to read the actual research and to stop making it up and misleading Canadians. With the permission of the House, I would table the public accounts document.

The Speaker: The minister does not need the permission of the House. He can table whatever he likes.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order to set the record straight on the family—

The Speaker: Order, please. Setting the record straight is not a point of order. It is a point of debate. I would invite the hon. member to perhaps raise it in question period or in statements by members, but setting the record straight is not to use up House time as a point of order.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, are the documents tabled by the minister in both official languages?

[English]

The Speaker: Order, please. It has come to the attention of the Chair that the document is in only one official language. Therefore, I would ask the Minister of State for Science and Technology to either provide a copy in both official languages or seek the consent of the House to table it in one official language.

Hon. Gary Goodyear: Mr. Speaker, I commit to tabling it in both official languages. I guarantee the facts are exactly the same. The research is consistent. The numbers are the same. The NDP is wrong, in both official languages.

The Speaker: We will wait for the document to be tabled in both official languages.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on that point of order, I do not know why the member referred to both being the same in both official languages. We do not have to laugh at our official languages of our country. We should respect that. There is something that happens with the government in disrespecting both official languages.

The Speaker: The minister has committed to tabling the document in both official languages and the House will wait for that before it is officially tabled.

[Translation]

I would like to thank the hon. member for Rivière-du-Nord for raising this point.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

● (1510)

*[English]***ENDING THE LONG-GUN REGISTRY ACT**

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-19, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

The Speaker: We will go to the questions and comments period for the Parliamentary to the Minister of National Revenue. Questions and comments.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak against Bill C-19 and show my strong support for maintaining the long gun registry. I recognize there is division among Canadians, and in my riding, on this point, but what evidence tells me in the end is that this registry saves lives.

Members opposite like to say that we have already debated the bill in full. There are a few things wrong with that argument.

First, nearly a third of the members in the House are new members and so we would like to have our say. We would like to be able to represent our constituents, those who sent us here to bring their opinions to the House.

The second thing that is wrong with the argument is that this is a different bill than was originally presented in the private member's bill introduced in May 2009 by the member for Portage—Lisgar. That bill simply removed the requirement to register long guns. This bill goes far further than that, in a sense that it is proposing to have a bonfire of the data and to destroy the very important data that has already been collected under the gun registry, data which plays a very important role in keeping both our police officers and the public safe.

Both police organizations and the provinces want us to maintain that data and use it to enhance public safety. The money has already been spent gathering the data and it should not be destroyed. It should be shared with the provinces who wish to continue a registry on their own, should this legislation pass.

There is an additional complication here because prior to this registry, businesses were required to keep records of the sale of non-restricted firearms. This bill does not make any provisions for reverting to this process and, as we heard earlier today in question period, this means that weapons that were earlier used in incidents, like the Montreal massacre, weapons that were used in the terrible incident in Norway, will no longer be subject to registration at sale or any registration at all in the country.

While New Democrats acknowledge that first nations and rural Canadians have some problems with this registry, we have tried to address those points that would make the registry less burdensome to them. We believe we can find a way to address the problems with the registry, while at the same time strengthening gun control.

What are our proposals? We have agreed that we ought to decriminalize the first time non-registration of long guns, making a one-time offence a non-criminal ticket. This would go a long way toward the objections that Conservatives like to raise that law-abiding Canadians are being hit by the gun registry. They would be given a chance to register their weapons without acquiring a criminal record.

We would also agree to enshrine in legislation that there would never be a fee charged for registration under the long gun registry. This would reduce the objection that there is a high cost to many in rural areas who have low incomes and who need firearms for hunting or other farm related usages.

We have also agreed that we could prevent the release of identifying information about gun owners, except for incidents which would protect public safety, or under court order, or by force of law.

We have also suggested that guarantees could be put together to ensure that aboriginal treaty rights would be protected. I have talked with first nations in my riding and this is a concern of theirs. It is not that they object in principle to the gun registry, it is not that they do not have concerns about public safety, but they do, as they always should, object when their aboriginal treaty rights are ignored and things proceed without any consultation or talks with them. We would like to work with rural and aboriginal Canadians. At the same time, we would like to continue to give the police the tools they need to keep our streets safe.

From my point of view, firearm registration is already a one-time only procedure. It would never expire unless the weapons were transferred to a new owner. Under those conditions, to me, it seems much like the conditions by which we require people to get both a driver's licence and to register their cars; in this case, a firearms acquisition certificate and registration of the actual firearms.

While we would work to make it as non-burdensome as possible, to make it as easy as possible to register those, I still believe in the registration of long guns as an important part of public safety.

What has convinced me? What persuades me that we need to keep the registry? I want to talk first of all about police. I am a former police board member in my own community. At the time the registry was introduced, it was seen as a very important tool by the police that I worked with every day.

● (1515)

The registry gives real time access to information. It is regularly updated when the public safety threats are identified and used when police respond to calls and referenced during important investigations. The police officers in my riding have told me again and again that it does provide them with the information they need to solve crimes involving firearms.

As of September 11, 2011, the Canadian Firearms Registry has been accessed 17,402 times per day. Again, there is no alternative being presented by the government that would allow the police to have similar information that would prevent crimes before they are actually committed with firearms.

In one survey which was conducted, 92% of general duty police officers said they use the Canadian firearms information system and 74% of those front line general duty police officers said the results have provided and proven beneficial during major police operations, that they have helped keep police officers safe and that they have improved public safety.

When we look at the unfortunate deaths of police officers in this country over the past 10 years, it is important to remember that long guns killed 10 out of 13 police officers who died in service of the public. This registry has been supported by police officers across the country.

Chief William Blair of Toronto said, "The registry gives officers information that keeps them safe. If the registry is taken from us, police officers may guess, but they cannot know. It could get them killed".

That is the first reason that persuades me that we need to keep this registry. The second is the evidence on the public record about public safety.

Since the introduction of stricter gun laws in 1991, there has been a 65% reduction in homicides by long guns. This is data from Statistics Canada. These are facts; these are not opinions. The reduction in homicides involving any type of firearm, in other words, other types of firearms, was only 37%, so there has definitely been an impact that would cause the reduction in long gun homicides to go down again by 65%, almost double the rate of reduction in other firearms.

From 1995, when the firearms registry became law, to 2010 there was a 41% reduction in homicides by long guns. Rifles and shotguns are the guns most often used in unfortunate suicides, particularly those involving youth. While these have decreased by 64% in nine years, from 329 in 1995 to 121 in 2005, there has been no evidence that other methods have been substituted. So again, an important role in reducing the number of suicides among youth.

Government Orders

The third reason is my contact with women's groups in my riding and across the country. They have paid particular attention to family violence and the role of long guns in family violence in this country. When we look at the case of spousal homicides involving firearms from 1980 to 2009, there is a decrease in those figures, but on average one of three women killed by their husbands were shot and 88% of them were shot with long guns legally owned.

Since the introduction of the gun registry, gun-related spousal homicides are down by 50%. So still a significant problem, but a problem which has been greatly reduced.

Members on the other side are fond of saying "when police officers go to domestic violence, they cannot trust the gun registry 100%". Well they can have fair warning if there are large numbers of weapons in that household. But that is not actually the issue.

The issue is, can guns be removed from households before there is an incident where someone is shot because police are aware, the weapons are registered, and lower levels of violence have indicated this may become a more serious problem in the future. That is where, in my mind, the real value of the registry is when we talk about family violence, the ability to identify weapons and remove them from the home before they are used for a terrible purpose like spousal murder.

The Conservatives like to argue that homicide rates have simply been on the decline and that our facts around public safety for women simply reflect that decline. But I have already said in my speech, we can show that there have been differential effects and greater decreases in the use of long guns in family violence, suicide and other public safety incidents.

• (1520)

When I stand today in opposition to this bill, I stand with police officers, women's groups, victims groups and the majority of Canadians.

Chief Daniel Parkinson of the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police said, "Scrapping the federal Firearms Registry will put our officers at risk and undermine our ability to prevent and solve crimes". Battered Women's Support Services in B.C. supports the registry and has gone so far as to ask the Liberal premier to set up a provincial registry if this legislation passes. The Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime says the majority of victims groups in this country support the registry.

I stand with the majority of British Columbias, 61% in the most recent public opinion survey, in support of the gun registry, and ask the government to abandon this reckless law.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member makes reference to the province of British Columbia. We know full well what the Government of Canada has said with regard to the province of Quebec in terms of the data bank.

My question to my New Democrat colleague is this. To what degree does he believe that the federal government has an obligation to support provinces that have a desire to continue a long gun registry by providing them the data bank as opposed to hitting the delete button and getting rid of the data bank, thereby causing a provincial government such as Quebec that would like the registry

put into place to have to recreate the data bank at a substantial cost when it could have spent money on many other projects?

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, I would like to see the long gun registry maintained. This is one of the most effective tools for public safety in the country. In British Columbia there is a debate just beginning about what happens if this legislation passes. That debate has not really developed because the government has not given us much time to debate it in the House of Commons. People have not really had a chance to consider what the proper response to the passage of this law would be.

I know that battered women's groups, as I mentioned, have taken the first step in calling on the Liberal government in British Columbia to establish such a registry. The important point is the destruction of data that the government is proposing. It would not even leave this option open to provinces. No matter what position they take in the future, it will foreclose the option of having provincial registries before there is even a chance to have that debate at the provincial level.

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question for my colleague has to do with the rhetoric we heard earlier during question period about the fact that the Conservatives are not changing the classification structure for some very powerful weapons. While it may be true, the effect of failing to change the classification structure appears to be that weapons that used to be registered before the gun registry ever existed now no longer have to be registered in any way, shape or form, which makes me feel less safe. Could the member comment on that, please?

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, it is perhaps one of the unforeseen side effects of this law that maybe the Conservatives had not thought about in their rush to pass it through without much debate. It seems that there are some weapons which will escape any kind of registration, including the kinds of weapons that were used by Marc Lépine in the incident at École Polytechnique and, as I said in my speech, in Norway. While I grant the Conservatives that it is probably not a deliberate attempt to deregister weapons, in fact it will allow these weapons to escape registration.

I am also concerned about the requirement to report sales of these kinds of weapons, which existed before the registry. Now that the registry is being abolished, we need to have the sales reports brought back.

Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my colleague's position and I find it quite difficult to understand a couple of things he said. I heard him say that people are going to be at risk because of these guns. Does that mean we are at risk if there is a military person in a tank or an airman in an aircraft? These types of people who possess guns do not create risk necessarily. Many target shooters and hunters enjoy those sports and we do not consider that they are dangerous people. The sweeping statement that everyone is at risk over this is not quite true.

He also referenced long gun homicides and suggested that there was a drop. Let me read from *The Chronicle Herald*, which states, "While it's true long-gun homicides have dropped since the registry was introduced, it's also true that murder rates have been—"

• (1525)

The Speaker: Order. I apologize for cutting off the hon. member, but I have to stop him there to give the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca a chance to respond.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member asked about military members. Of course, they all have IDs, they are all registered and everyone knows what weapons they are carrying. I have no doubts about them doing their job safely, but if they were to take those weapons from their job into another context which would be inappropriate, we would know that they have the weapons and we would know who they are.

My point about the registration of weapons is that it allows us to know who can safely possess handguns and they are no threat. It is similar to those who like to drive. Those who like to target shoot should register their guns and get a licence. This is no heavy burden on them in comparison to the gain we get in public safety. It is by knowing who possesses weapons that weapons can be removed from the hands of those who may have mental instability problems, addiction problems, or family violence problems.

I am not trying to remove guns from the hands of legitimate hunters, target shooters or—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member is out of time.

I understand the hon. member for South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale is rising on a point of order.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

BILL C-317 INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to respond to the member for Windsor—Tecumseh, who again has raised certain objections to my private member's bill, Bill C-317. I must note that the member did not raise a single objection or make a substantive argument in response to my rebuttal, nor can he.

To reiterate, it is simply the case that Bill C-317 does not give any additional taxation power to the Canada Revenue Agency that it does not already have. It merely enumerates two of the most relevant of those already existing powers. To be specific, the CRA already has the power to revoke a labour organization's tax exempt status and revoke dues deductibility. The CRA has the power to do this for several different types of violations of the Income Tax Act, including the one that is specifically identified in this bill, the failure of a labour organization to file a return.

As the bill does not grant the CRA any new powers to revoke tax exempt status or dues deductibility, there is no new ability created to collect extra revenue.

Only the requirements surrounding what must be included in a public information return are new. Let me emphasize that labour organizations must already file returns. They already face con-

sequences for failure to file returns. The tax consequences for failure to file returns already exist. Those tax consequences are not increased or changed by the bill. The only thing that would change is what information is required in the public information return.

While the public information return I propose is not onerous, it is probably more detailed in some areas than what is currently required of labour organizations. However, requiring more detail than may be presently expected does not mean requiring more tax or a new tax. It is already the case that a labour organization could refuse to file its currently required tax return, and it could face losing its tax exempt status and dues deductibility as a result.

Under my bill, a labour organization could also refuse to file its tax return, including the new public information return that I propose, and it would face the identical consequences.

Let us use the member's own example of a dues-paying worker whose income was slightly below the second income tax bracket and was forced to pay taxes because of lost dues deductibility.

The member used an example to fit the definition of creating a new taxpayer, as it states in *Beauchesne's*, "an extension of the incidence of a tax so as to include persons not already payers".

The example could be a realistic scenario; I do not debate that. However, it makes no difference. Using the same example, the same dues-paying worker could be forced into paying taxes right now if his or her union refused to file its tax return today.

Nothing would change for that dues-paying worker with the passage of my bill. The power to create a taxpayer out of the dues-paying worker in the member's example was granted to the Canada Revenue Agency a long time ago. My bill does nothing to change that.

Frankly, that is the long and the short of it. My bill's sole purpose is to ask for more detailed information and to make it public. It does not impose any additional or new tax consequences on a labour organization or its members.

A different point the member raised in his response concerned the requirement of unionized employees to pay dues. Of course, in my response I did not dispute the requirement to pay dues, nor did I suggest that it was discretionary under certain labour contracts. Instead, I pointed out that employees always have the option to choose which union they want to represent them.

Again, Mr. Speaker, if you read the transcript carefully, you will see that the member did not address the substance of the point that I raised. Instead, he was merely dismissive of the well-established fact that union members can decertify their existing union and certify another one. In Canada this happens all the time for a variety of reasons with which the member is undoubtedly familiar.

Points of Order

● (1530)

I greatly suspect at this very moment if a union local deliberately violated the Income Tax Act by refusing to file a return and put its tax exempt status and its member dues deductibility at risk, its members would take action. One of those possible actions would be, as I stated, to decertify the union and bring in another. As the member himself pointed out, unions are democratic institutions, so another action might be to democratically remove the board of the local and install one that would comply with the law and thus preserve the dues deductibility of members.

The bottom line is that while it may be mandatory to pay dues, dues-paying employees do have options, including whether or not to pay their dues to a labour organization that qualifies for dues deductibility under the Income Tax Act.

However, regardless of the choices that union members may make, Mr. Speaker, I would urge you to focus on my major point, that there is no difference in the potential tax consequences in the scenario of a labour organization failing to file a tax return under the present Income Tax Act versus a labour organization failing to file under the amendments proposed by my bill.

Finally, let me note that both in his point of order and in his later response, the member disappointingly used a considerable portion of his remarks to engage in actual debate over the substance of my bill. He raised issues clearly unrelated to his point of order over ways and means, such as what he falsely assumes my bill would cost unions and his favourite theory about the strategy behind my bill.

The proper place for the member to raise these issues would be the time allotted for private members' business, and I would be happy to correct the member on his faulty arguments during that time.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for his further intervention on this point.

Resuming debate. The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

ENDING THE LONG-GUN REGISTRY ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-19, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Mr. Greg Rickford (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak in favour of Bill C-19, the ending the long gun registry bill.

I beg to differ with previous speakers from the other side that this particular subject has not been exhausted. We debated this subject in previous sessions of Parliament. I want to revisit a few of the discussion points from that time, but I will start by saying that our government believes strongly that to keep our streets and communities safe, we need to give the police the tools they need to do their jobs. I think we can all agree on that.

We need to continue to invest in smart crime prevention measures and ensure that dangerous criminals are taken out of circulation so that they can no longer victimize innocent Canadians. I might add as a substantive point, there is a need to deal with gun-related crimes. This is action this government has taken in the past.

As all members of the House know, our party's position and commitment dates back to 1995 when the previous Liberal government inflicted this lack-lustre attempt to deal with gun related crimes. What we wound up with was legislation that put gun control on law-abiding hunters, first nations, Inuit, farmers and sport shooters across the country. For these reasons the Conservative Party, now the government, has long opposed the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry.

By eliminating the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry, we instead can focus our efforts on more effective measures to tackle crime and protect families and communities.

I want to re-emphasize for the purposes of this debate what this bill would do. It would repeal the requirement to register non-restricted firearms, long guns; provide for the destruction of all records pertaining to the registration of long guns in the Canadian firearms registry and under the control of the chief firearms officer; and maintain control over restricted and prohibited firearms.

I also want to re-emphasize the fact that the ending the long gun registry bill would not in any way derogate from important legislation and policy that will continue to meet the important public policy safeguards around legal long gun possession and acquisitions. Specifically, firearm owners, or those who wish to acquire a firearm or ammunition, would continue to be required to undergo a police background check, pass a rigorous firearms safety course, and comply with all firearms safe storage and transportation requirements. Furthermore, firearms owners would also still require a valid a firearms licence to purchase and possess long guns and to register restricted and prohibited firearms, such as hand guns.

Obviously, these are important measures that we have actually fortified, not to mention of course making sure that the screening process has even more rigour to it to ensure that responsible long gun owners have their affairs in order to possess these types of long guns.

We are investing in a number of effective measures in this regard and in the broader public safety initiative. We are fighting organized crime, which is where many gun-related crimes occur, almost always with illegal weapons and prohibited firearms. We are introducing mandatory minimum penalties for serious gun crimes. We are combatting gun smuggling. Those are measures that we have taken and ones which we will continue to take.

I want to take a moment to summarize some of what has been presented to the House by my colleagues. There are two particular points.

First and most important, in the recent election Canadians from coast to coast gave our government a strong mandate to end the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry once and for all, and that is exactly what the bill would do.

I would say by way of extension, the great Kenora riding has a rich tradition in hunting. Our first nations communities, many of which are isolated, depend on the safe possession and acquisition of long guns and ammunition for their traditions and way of life. They gave me a strong mandate to carry this message forward to our government.

• (1535)

Second, in contrary to what some special interest groups tell us, the bill does not weaken gun controls. I have alluded already to the fact that real gun control in this country is done through an effective licensing program, good legislation and public policy around prohibited and illegal weapons and the crimes that are committed with them. Licensing is what affects people, and it is how people who should not own firearms are identified. Bill C-19 simply does not change or address licensing at all. To say otherwise would be a misstatement of fact.

Third, the destruction of records is a necessary part of fulfilling our commitment to Canadians. I find this new hedging argument quite interesting. If the registration list still occurs, then it is in fact, by simple logic, still a registry. More importantly, in my respectful view, this is private information that was given by law-abiding citizens under federal legislation at the time. I do not believe that it is available for the opposition parties to raise what has become a new dimension to their debate. Perhaps it is out of exasperation that some of their members and others of the third party have lost seats in the House over this issue. Perhaps that is why they would create something out of what I believe is not just insignificant, but a misstatement of facts.

I want to remind members of the fundamentals of the long gun registry. It is a process by which law-abiding long gun owners are compelled by force of law to disclose personal information to the state. Those data are then stored and used as part of a gun control system. If we accept that this is neither an effective gun control system nor an appropriate use of billions of dollars of taxpayers' money, then by default we logically must agree that these data must be destroyed. It is also widely accepted that the data are incomplete and out of date and will become increasingly so over time.

As well, in an effort to grasp at any argument they can get their hands on, the NDP suggests that the destruction of these records would cost "untold millions", in the words of the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley. This concerns me. The destruction of records contained in the long gun registry will not result in additional costs to Canadian taxpayers.

I will use my last couple of minutes to reflect fondly on the rich traditions of many northwestern Ontarians including, perhaps critically, our first nations communities.

Points of Order

I appreciate the countless number of chiefs, particularly those in isolated and remote first nations, who have laid out the problems that the gun registry has posed for them in their communities, not just in terms of possession and acquisition but also in the challenges with respect to ammunition. They have spoken loud and clear.

I am here as part of a bigger northwestern Ontario picture on this particular piece of legislation. With great honour and respect, as a long gun owner myself, I would impress upon the House that we must consider the rich traditions of many rural and northern Canadians, particularly those in isolated and remote communities. For example, I have had an opportunity to spend some time in the western Arctic, where I have engaged in hunting and the like.

Coming from northwestern Ontario, I realize that the opposition, particularly the NDP, are firmly divided on this issue. We have seen colleagues across the floor who are from my region vote in support of abolishing the registry, and I encourage those members to maintain their position. We know how northwestern Ontarians feel.

I agree with the intellectual point that there may be a desire for us to move on from this debate. Northwestern Ontarians want to participate in other regional issues and issues of national interest. However, I do not accept what is being proffered by members of the opposite party, particularly the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley, who says that the passion has been lost.

• (1540)

To the contrary, we have never felt stronger about this. We want to move on, and I am asking members to support this important piece of legislation.

[Translation]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Over the past few months, I have met with representatives of women's organizations in my riding. I am referring here to the Centre féminin du Saguenay, which has been taking care of abused women and their children since 1976, and Maison Isa, which is an organization that helps victims of sexual abuse. I met with these representatives at their request and I was happy to do so. These people told me just how important the firearms registry is and how useful it has been to them in their work with abused women. They spoke about the many instances in which a woman was afraid of her husband, who owned a firearm, and just how useful the registry could be in such situations.

What does the government have to say to these women who fear for their lives and the lives of their children?

Points of Order

• (1545)

[English]

Mr. Greg Rickford: Mr. Speaker, I can appreciate that this member may have consulted with his constituents if he can appreciate that I spent a great deal of my life living in isolated and remote first nations communities. I have a rich professional background in dealing with a variety of domestic and sexual assaults, most unfortunately. Not one of them revolved around a gun-related incident. However, I can tell the member that this is exactly what the licensing process is intended to deal with.

The licensing process, which would not be affected by this legislation, deals specifically with stringent guidelines to prevent those kinds of people with those kinds of tendencies in those kinds of circumstances from lawfully possessing or acquiring long guns. That is an important intellectual point, and in the context of domestic abuse and sexual assaults, it is a more than important practical point in this debate.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the member can provide a comment in relation to individual provinces. In particular, the Province of Quebec has indicated that it wants to reinstate a long gun registry in the province of Quebec. I understand other provinces might give it consideration. Some provinces have said “no” to it; I believe Manitoba has said “absolutely not” to the long gun registry. However, we notice that there are differences of opinion.

Could the member provide a comment on whether this legislature should support the Province of Quebec in its desire to have the long gun registry and on whether we can show that support by allowing them access to the data? The privacy issue that the member refers to, in the opinion of many, is just more of an excuse. Can we put that excuse to the side and provide—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Greg Rickford: Mr. Speaker, I am never clear whether this is about a word count for the member or whether he is shifting his representation to the Province of Quebec.

I will answer in unequivocal terms. The answer is “no”.

That is private information that was given to legislation. It was given in the context of that piece of legislation. That is all it is for. It is the position of this government, and one that I strongly support and have encouraged my colleagues to support, that this information not be disseminated.

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wanted to compliment the member on an excellent speech. I know there are many people in northern Ontario who are deeply concerned about this issue.

I know, for example, that when the gun registry was first established, the leader of the NDP voted against doing so. Audrey McLaughlin, the MP for Yukon, like many other northerners, was very concerned about it. In my riding of Ottawa West—Nepean there are a substantial number of people who are concerned about this issue.

When we promised to scrap the gun registry, we did not promise to just forward it so that someone else could re-establish it. As a word, “scrap” has a very clear sense. I wonder if the member opposite could comment on that.

Mr. Greg Rickford: Mr. Speaker, I do not always like to debate this issue as a division between urban versus rural and remote, but I can appreciate the issues and I think we have debated them at length. However, importantly, I share the member's concern over the inconsistencies, particularly in the official opposition's position on this issue. We know now, as members have said quite recently in press releases and statements outside this place, that there is division. We have seen a clear message from some of our NDP colleagues in northwestern Ontario, who I appreciate have stood with us to abolish and scrap the long gun registry; let us see if they maintain that position and do not create new hedging arguments to keep it.

That is not something Canadians accept. It certainly is not something—

• (1550)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please.

The hon. member for Western Arctic.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last year I voted in favour of a private member's bill put forward by the member for Portage—Lisgar that would have done away with the long gun registry. That bill was a blunt instrument; however, it restricted itself to eliminating the need to register long guns. Now in front of Parliament we have the government's Bill C-19, which is not only a blunt instrument but a wrong-headed and meanspirited instrument, a bill that would drive a greater wedge between rural and urban Canadians.

The Conservatives are supposed to be the Government of Canada, a truly national government that is supposed to govern for all Canadians, not just the less than 40% who voted for it.

I have never hidden my position on the long gun registry. My position has always been that the long gun registry does not belong in the federal Criminal Code. Provincial, territorial and aboriginal governments should be the ones to determine how long guns are registered in their various jurisdictions. In 2000 the Supreme Court agreed with that position and said that every government has the right to register firearms. Firearms registration is not something that goes against our laws; it fits with the property laws of the provinces, and it would not be within the Criminal Code if the provinces took it over.

Bill C-19 goes against my position because the data would be destroyed without those other governments first being asked if they wished to use the data as the basis for their own registries.

The government has foisted upon Parliament a bill that is a slap in the face to Canadians in those parts of the country that favour a long gun registry, like Quebec. Before the federal registry, Quebec even had a plan to put in its own provincial registry.

The Conservatives claim they have to destroy the data because of privacy concerns that would make it impossible to transfer the data. I asked the Privacy Commissioner about this aspect. Here is her response:

Generally, s. 8(2)(f) of the Act permits the disclosure of personal information "under an agreement or arrangement between the Government of Canada or an institution thereof and the government of a province ... for the purpose of administering or enforcing any law or carrying out a lawful investigation." Therefore, in appropriate circumstances, an information sharing agreement or arrangement put in place for the purpose of administering or enforcing any law (including provincial law) could assist to ensure any transfer of personal information was in conformity with the *Privacy Act*.

For those on the other side, this means that as long as there is an agreement allowing the transfer of the information, there are no Privacy Act concerns.

This ill-considered bill would cause farmers, hunters and trappers nothing but headaches and cost all Canadians more money in the end.

One of the advantages of a registry is that it provides an accurate means to show lawful transfer of firearms, but confusion will be the order of the day after the passage of Bill C-19. For instance, the Conservatives have not taken the safe storage provisions out of the Criminal Code. They remain, and will likely be more rigidly enforced by the police in the future.

Because of this poorly thought out bill, a number of important questions will have to be answered. For example, will someone who lends his or her gun to someone else be responsible for its proper storage? If a person gives a family member a gun and does not record that transaction in a proper fashion, will that individual still be liable for any unfortunate results of unsafe storage? Will the individual end up with a criminal record because he or she will have no simple, legal and effective way to mark this transaction?

It is vital to offer something for gun owners to reduce liability in sale, possession, responsibility for safe storage, and transfer of ownership. An effective, simple and reliable non-criminal registry at the local government level is something the vast majority of Canadians can accept and should be entitled to, without having to pay for it all over again; however, because the Conservatives did not think this through, by the time Canadian firearm owners begin dealing with these headaches, the data will have been destroyed.

The bill means that gun owners who live in those parts of Canada that want the registry will have to go through the process of re-registering their guns. Reburdening gun owners like that shows exactly how little the Conservatives have thought the bill through.

If Bill C-19 passes as presented, provincial, territorial or aboriginal governments that want to establish a registry will have to go back to square one, at great taxpayer expense, and redo the whole thing.

● (1555)

Gun owners in the jurisdiction will be forced to fill out more forms and pay more fees. Police will have to wait years to have a useful tool to work with. One province has already said that it wants to reconstitute a provincial registry, that being Quebec, and more may consider the options too. No one will end up with a criminal record by failing to comply with these provincial or territorial registries.

Because of the flaws in the bill and because I support the purpose of getting the bill out of the Criminal Code, I intend to move amendments that would put in place a three-year waiting period

Points of Order

before the data could be destroyed. The Conservatives claim the NDP government, if elected in 2015, would want the data preserved to recreate the registry. My amendment would see that the data that was not picked up by the provinces would be destroyed in 2014.

As an aside, it is pleasing to hear that even the Conservatives could recognize the potential for the next election.

My amendments would require the government to consult with the provinces, territories and aboriginal governments to see if they wanted to recreate their own non-criminal registries.

Finally, my amendments would require that the data for those jurisdictions that wanted a registry would be transferred to the respective governments. This amendment would save Canadians hassles and money.

What we have in front of us is a government that is full of its own majority. It is full of the direction that it can take without responding to the needs of Canadians. It is a government that wants to do everything its own way.

When we talk about a band of lemmings charging over hill, it strikes me that is what is happening with the registry right now.

There are important and significant legal issues with the bill. They are issues that take time to debate and understand. We have seen the Conservatives put closure on the debate.

I am sure we will see the bill go to committee. I hope at that point in time the Conservatives will listen to reason and will take the time to understand the issues that are presented with the creation of Bill C-19.

The effort to remove the long gun registry from the federal Criminal Code is a useful thing to do. What has been layered on top of it is a slap in the face to co-operative federalism, to registered gun owners who wish to have some measure of liability protection as easily as possible and to a lot of Canadians.

The government does not have to do this. It does not have to be didactic about this. It should understand that it is making laws that will affect the lives of Canadians and legitimate gun owners and impact the liability of many people. It can make the right choice and support an amendment which would allow the data to be shared with the rest of the country, with the other jurisdictions that have a right to the data, as the Supreme Court said in 2000.

The government can do that. It does not have to turn its back on Canadians. It does not have to turn its back on the provinces. It does not have to act with its shirt full. It does not have to act puffed up and proud of what it is doing. It can act civilly for Canadians.

If it wants the approbation from other political people in the country, then the government should act civilized, do the right thing and follow the amendments.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to comment on the hon. member's last statement. He wanted to know why the government was not concerned about what other political people in our country might think.

Points of Order

We are very concerned about what our constituents believe. The member knows well, as does most of the members in the House, that for the last five elections, and over the last 11 years, it has been a commitment that this party has made. It is not an agenda that was not laid out clearly before the electorate. My constituents knew when I ran in the election that the long gun registry was one of the platform planks in my rural riding, and will stick to my promise.

It is not about pleasing other political people such as MPs, senators and other politicians. It is about living up to my word to my constituents.

Why has the member, who I am certain has supported getting rid of the long gun registry in the past, backed down from his word as have most of his party?

● (1600)

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, in 2000, I stood in Parliament the first time. I said at the time, and it is on the public record, that I thought the way to go with the long-gun registry was to put it in the hands of the provinces, the municipalities, those that could deal with it at a level that was appropriate. What I found offensive about the long gun registry was that it was enforced by the federal Criminal Code, so it made criminals out of people it should not have.

I am very much in favour of decriminalization of aspects of our law, this being one of them. I am sure if the Conservatives consider many other aspects of our law that could be considered for decriminalization too, they would be on the right track.

However, on this one, when you make the decision to destroy the data when you know perfectly well, through the Supreme Court decision in 2000, that the provinces have the right to take over the data and create their own registries, you are making—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. I would remind the hon. members it is a good idea to direct their questions and comments through the Chair.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we all know there is a great deal of interest in what is happening today in the House, as stakeholders throughout the country have voiced their concerns and their opinions, stakeholders which include many different police forces, chiefs of police, women advocacy groups and many different non-profit organizations. They have come forward and said that they want the government to listen and to base its decisions on facts.

To what degree does the member believe the government is listening to any of the thousands of Canadians who want the government to at least appreciate the facts of the issue?

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, my understanding of the debate over the gun registry has been that there has been very little attention paid to the facts on all sides in this debate. I have tried to take a rational, reasonable approach to important legislation. I have followed consistently what I have said over the years, and that is hunting implements should be part of property law. They should be enforced by the provinces, territories and aboriginal governments. They are hunting instruments. They are part of our culture. That would be a more appropriate place to have them registered, like cars, like dogs, as has been pointed out.

I am okay with the law coming out, but I am not okay with small-minded thinking that will destroy data that is useful to provinces that want to establish their own registries.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, in relation to the destruction of data, has the member for Western Arctic seen the position of the Association of Canadian Archivists, which is raising issues about a significant public policy change in relation to documents?

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, I will take that question under advisement. Any time data and records are destroyed with no purpose other than to sort of cast it off in a way that is emotional rather than rational, then I am against it.

Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to our Conservative government's bill to scrap the long gun registry. Over the course of the debate, we have heard from many hon. colleagues on both sides of the House. I am glad to add my voice and the voices of constituents to this important debate today on Bill C-19, ending the long-gun registry act.

I consider Palliser, which I have the great privilege to represent, a very special riding. It includes Moose Jaw, parts of Regina, as well as 11 rural municipalities. This law targets residents of my riding who are law-abiding gun owners, while doing nothing to prevent gun crime in urban areas.

Ending the long gun registry has been a long-standing commitment of this government. It has been part of our promise to Canadians that we would stand up for law-abiding families and deliver law and order measures that would actually work. That means measures that actually stop crime. That means measures that hold criminals accountable. That means measures that demonstrate real results to keep our communities safe.

Along with a strong economy, these are the priorities of Canadian families. They told us that loud and clear when our government was given a strong mandate on May 2, and we intend to deliver on our commitment.

Let me emphasize this point again. On this side of the House, we support laws and measures that actually work to stop crime and deliver results. We are against burdening law-abiding citizens with unnecessary, time-consuming paperwork that serves no purpose and costs taxpayers. We do not believe in treating hunters, rural residents or outdoor enthusiasts with unfounded suspicion. We also do not want to waste taxpayer money on programs that do not accomplish the intended objective.

For years the registry has been a burden on law-abiding hunters and rural residents. For years law-abiding long gun owners have been forced to comply with useless government regulations. The real question is, has it worked? I am afraid the answer to the question is no. The original intention in creating the long gun registry was to prevent gun crimes. However, when we look at the evidence, the facts are clear. The long gun registry does not prevent crime, does not protect front-line police officers and does not keep guns out of the hands of criminals.

Registered long guns account for less than 2% of homicides committed with a firearm and less than one-third of crimes committed with a firearm. It is important to note that in the very rare case where someone intends to commit a crime using a registered long gun, the fact that it is registered does not stop that individual. The long gun registry has no preventive mechanisms.

It is also important to be clear which firearms we are speaking about today. We are talking about ending the failed and ineffective long gun registry. We are not talking about handguns. In fact, handguns have accounted for two-thirds of firearm-related violence since 1998. The bill we are discussing has nothing to do with the regulation and registration of handguns.

What about criminals who actually use firearms? Criminals do not register their guns and generally use handguns not long guns, so the long gun registry does nothing to hold criminals accountable. Imagine a criminal or someone with the intention of committing a crime standing in line and paying a fee to register a long gun. That scenario simply will not happen. Criminals do not bother complying with government regulations.

If criminals are not held accountable, who really bears the burden of the long gun registry? The answer to that is law-abiding long gun owners bear the burden. They acquire them legally and operate them responsibly, but they are the people who are saddled with the paperwork and registration fees. The long gun registry also does nothing to ensure firearm safety use. The long gun registry does nothing to encourage the responsible use of firearms. This is a useless burden that does nothing to prevent gun crime or encourage the responsible use of firearms.

● (1605)

This is a burden that signals to Canadians that they are regarded with suspicion and regarded as potential criminals just because they happen to own a legal object, a common item that is part of the lifestyle for many Canadians and common to many communities all across Canada.

I also want to briefly mention the cost. The long gun registry was supposed to cost \$2 million. The cost is now up to over \$2 billion and we see that the registry does not deter or prevent gun crime. Hard-working Canadians also bear the burden of this pointless registry. We need to scrap the registry and stop wasting money. We need to stop stigmatizing farmers, outdoor enthusiasts and rural residents and we need to stop targeting the wrong people. We need to target the real criminals instead.

In fact, our Conservative government has been taking measures to target the real criminals already. We have already passed some important legislation on gun crime in previous Parliaments. We

enacted mandatory jail time for drive-by shooting and tougher sentences and bail conditions for serious gun crimes. These are important steps that target real criminals. We have cracked down on reckless street racing. Street racing is a crime and it should be recognized that way.

Again, we are creating measures that hold criminals accountable and leave law-abiding Canadians to live their lives in safety and security. We are proud of our actions. Our government is taking action to keep families safe with our recently introduced safe streets and communities act. This act includes preventing serious criminals from serving their sentences in their living room. We are taking steps to ensure that criminals face real consequences for their wrongdoing.

The safe streets and communities act includes tougher penalties for those who would sell drugs to our kids and it would prevent serious criminals and those convicted of sexual assault from ever being able to receive a pardon. In Canada, serious crimes deserve a long-lasting consequence.

We need to move away from past mistakes by scrapping this registry that puts the burden on the wrong people. I suggest that we move forward to deliver results for Canadians. We need move forward and build on progressive legislation that we have made in keeping our communities safe over the past two years. We need to target criminals and help stop real crime.

On behalf of the residents of my riding, I strongly support Bill C-19 that would put an end to the long gun registry.

● (1610)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are arguing that they are opposed to the data transfer because it constitutes a violation of privacy. The Privacy Commissioner, Jennifer Stoddart, has found that this does not violate privacy in any way. In fact, she maintains that the data can be shared between the government and the provinces to help the provinces enforce their laws. There is no need to impose costs. All that is required is an agreement between the federal government and the provinces that wish to participate, like Quebec.

When will the current government take action to sign agreements with Quebec and the provinces that wish to participate?

[English]

Mr. Ray Boughen: Mr. Speaker, our government has been very straightforward and crystal clear. We want to scrap the registry, which means scrapping all of the bells and whistles that hang onto it, all the paper trails, all of those things. The information is submitted by people in a private information gathering way. We do not feel that we can pass that on to anyone. If the provinces want their own gun registry, then so be it, but we are scrapping ours.

Points of Order

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to follow up on that question. Common sense would dictate that to completely scrap, hit the delete button and destroy the information and not provide any of it to the province of Quebec, which is looking at it, will cost the Quebec taxpayers millions and millions of dollars. Those millions of dollars could be so much better spent on issues such as community policing, health care, nurses, doctors and so many other things.

Does the member not see the benefit of allowing Quebec to retain a long gun registry, because that is what the Government of Quebec would like to do? Why destroy the information?

Mr. Ray Boughen: Mr. Speaker, part of the answer to that question is the reliability of the data. It has not been updated and it would be unreliable data. In talking with police chiefs, they suggest to their men, when they go to domestic disputes, that they go as if there are guns in the homes they are investigating because the registry is simply not up to date.

The other point that needs to be raised is the fact that, when I fill out a form for one level of government, I do not automatically say that all levels of government should have access to the information on that form. That is what we are saying here. I do not believe there is any legalese to support that position.

• (1615)

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is a misunderstanding for which I need some clarification. The registry is actually the data and if we do not get rid of the data then I suspect we do not get rid of the registry. I do not think it is too deep a thought, particularly when the Auditor General said that the information was not reliable. It is information that should be accurate.

I am wondering if the member has a comment to that question.

Mr. Ray Boughen: Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, in talking with a number of police chiefs across Canada, they have said, off the record, that the registry is not usable for their men because it has not been kept up to date. Therefore, it is a piece of equipment that has no use.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I was taken aback to find that, when I made a point earlier in this debate regarding archivists, hon. members on the opposite side found it amusing.

I want to pursue that with the hon. member for Palliser. It is actually current federal law that materials produced through the legislative process remain in our archives. Privacy is protected. This is the normal course of affairs. It is really disturbing to people in the field of archivists and historians to see data destroyed.

Names would not be used but the historical data is valuable. Does the government realize it is changing public policy in a fundamental way?

Mr. Ray Boughen: Mr. Speaker, again I would share with the member that the data is suspect in terms of accuracy. The data has not been kept up to date. It is data that belongs to the federal government, not to the provincial governments. If the federal government chooses not to share that data, then it is certainly within its rights.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the gun registry debate has gone on for a number of years, since before its creation, to its creation, to its eventual slow demise and death under the government, to this most radical posture that the current government has taken. I find we are now at a point where the government's ideology has fully taken over any sense of balance or common sense.

I say ideology because when a government says that its mandate, which it believes it has, to do something, in this case destroy records that were paid for by Canadians, was implied in the last election. The Conservatives did not talk about it. They did not ask any Canadians about it. However, it is implied. That is the most dangerous set of principles for a government to run on because, if it believes things are implied, it can read into any decision that voters may or may not have made to arrive at a conclusion that is convenient to the government of the day.

The Conservatives do have a mandate to end the long gun registry. In the unfortunate and broken electoral system that we have, a party can win with less than 40% of the vote but end up with virtually 100% of the power. That is something that we in the NDP seek to correct so that voters can see their votes actually reflected in the government that sits in this place. If there has ever been an example of a government abusing its power and its very thin marginal endorsement from voters, it is the present government on this issue.

The Conservatives hold up the privacy of the people we seek to represent and yet I have a letter here that the government is now aware of from no other person than the Privacy Commissioner of Canada who says that the act permits the disclosure of personal information under an agreement or arrangement between the Government of Canada or an institution thereof and the government of a province for the purpose of administering or enforcing any law or carrying out any lawful investigation.

There are no privacy concerns. One would suspect that the Privacy Commissioner of Canada would be the authority on any concerns with respect to privacy, otherwise, why set up the office? Why pay the salaries and have the staff if we are not going to listen to the advice of an officer of Parliament?

It seems, unfortunately, and too typical of the government to take an issue and then run to the extreme by suggesting that a \$2 billion bonfire on Parliament Hill of all the records that have been assorted and assembled would somehow make that \$2 billion come back.

I have an interesting moment for my Conservative colleagues who raised the issue of cost. It has been a fair criticism of the long gun registry because it was promised at a much lower cost than it eventually realized. Whether it was between \$1 billion or \$2 billion, it cost too much. That is a fair and honest concern.

Points of Order

However, we asked the government how much it would cost to delete all the records, because it is not a simple matter of hitting a button to delete seven million records. Each one needs to be done individually. The RCMP says that it is not sure of the exact number but that it would be many millions. When we asked the government if it had an estimate on the cost of destroying all of these records, it said "no, never mind, it is worth it". Does that sound familiar to the ones who set up the registry in the first place, "no, never mind, it is worth it?"

The Conservatives have now flipped to the other side and, because of their ideology, they cannot find their way to have a simple and honest conversation with Canadians who paid for this data in the first place. The Conservatives cannot tell Canadians that they are going to burn this data and spend many millions more destroying it.

For heaven's sake, the government claims to respect the authority of the provinces and we have a province is clearly asking for the data.

● (1620)

[Translation]

Quebec has publicly asked for the data from the registry. Quebecers paid for it. Why is this government telling Quebecers that they need to pay again to get this information, to have a gun registry? It is ridiculous and stupid. This government will now say anything to the people of Quebec. It is saying that it is the Conservative government. It used to say that the opinion of Quebecers was important. What an insult. It is ridiculous and it makes no sense.

[English]

We also see that the government, in its own legislation that it crafted up around Bill C-19, has to take an entire section to subvert and overcome Canadian law that says we cannot destroy records. It seems like a good law, does it not, that a government, whatever its ideological stripe, whatever its persuasion, whatever mandate it perceives, should not be capable of destroying records that were collected from the Canadian public. Does that sound familiar at all?

I wonder if next the Conservatives will destroy any of the votes that the farmers across the Prairies took in respect to the Wheat Board because they did not like the results of those votes. Let us destroy those records too because it is not in line with the ideology and the so-called mandate of the government.

It is anti-democratic. It is against the institution of what this place represents that from time to time we collect records from Canadians, criminal records, health records, in this case gun registry records. It is not for the government of the day to write laws that subvert other laws that exist for good reason.

What is the precedent being set by the government? That if the Conservatives find something inconvenient, they will simply write into legislation, "Never mind all those things we said about keeping records, that should be borne into our laws and Constitution of this country. We will simply override them because it fits our world view".

The government spends so much of its time claiming that it defends the brave men and women of our law enforcement

departments across the country. Then a law enforcement official comes forward and says, and my good colleague from Ontario will know this, "We would like access to the data".

We have the letter from the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police saying, "It is fine that you are shutting down this registry, but please allow us access to the data". Suddenly the government is not so interested in respecting or listening to the police of this country. Suddenly the government says, "Never mind the expertise or the officials, the folks who run our police department. They do not know". All the Conservatives have to say is, "I have spoken to police officers who, off the record, say the gun registry is not important to them".

However, through their own democratic institutions, the people they put forward to head up their police associations, those people are on the record as saying, "Please allow us access to the data to do our jobs".

It comes to a point where ideology clashes with common sense, and we are at this point with the government. We seek from the government a moment of common sense because there are those like myself, my friend from Western Arctic and others who have for years campaigned and voted on ending the long gun registry because that represented the position of the constituents I represent in northwestern British Columbia. That was their clear and express purpose, and I think we should always maintain that bind, but the Conservatives have inserted into the bill, unlike the last provisions the last time the House voted, a poison pill into the legislation, making it a poisoned bill, and they know exactly what they have done.

The Conservatives are giving the shout out to the most ideological, the most radical elements of this conversation for no good reason because the law-abiding hunters and farmers of this country who use guns to either feed their families or protect their homes, those of which I represent in northern B.C., those people do not care if Quebec wants to set up its own registry, if Montreal wants to enforce a different set of regulations around gun ownership, or if Toronto wants to enforce a more serious provision through the provinces, why, for heaven's sake, would the government care?

When I talk to people in northern British Columbia, rural Canada, they say that they have had their disputes with the registry, but if folks in Winnipeg want to have a different set of rules and guidelines directed to them by their province, so be it. Why would the government intervene? For a government that claims to respect the authority and jurisdiction of provinces, of which the cities are a product, why step in between?

Points of Order

The Conservatives have poisoned the well. They have made this an unsupportable piece of legislation, and there must be Conservatives across the way who campaigned on this, and as well as their right and intention, that understand that the precedent being created here is a dangerous one. It is a damaging one to the fabric of what this country stands for, which is simple and basic representation, that the burning of records is done by a government that holds on to an ideology of the most severe nature.

We should look through the history books. What governments burned records? What regimes burned records? There are not many. This government is about to become one of them. Do the Conservatives not have any pause?

That is right, my friend says. He would like to associate himself with other governments which, through the course of history, have burned public records. Now he scoffs. He cannot figure himself out. We are either for the burning of public records or we are not, and what we have arrived at here is a government that has lost its way.

• (1625)

The practice of wedge politics, of dividing one group of Canadians from another, rural versus urban, the west versus the east, Quebec and all the rest, has to stop. It is destructive and harmful. It does not serve any greater purpose other than some narrow, ideological partisan interest and it has to stop.

Change the bill, correct it, end the ideological attack and make some sense to all Canadians.

Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that was a very enlightening statement. It is a shame that the people across the aisle feel all they can do is scoff and sneer at democratic discussion and debate.

I would like my hon. colleague to elaborate a little more on the fact that the riding I represent is in favour of the gun registry. It is in favour of the gun registry because it has endured more than its fair share of loss due to people who were not criminals but still had access to long guns. Many Montrealers lost people, including two young people I used to work with at a youth organization during the École Polytechnique incident.

I wonder if my colleague could expand on that a bit more.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, there are personal stories around this issue on both sides, I would suggest. That is why this debate becomes so emotional very often.

I say to my Conservative colleagues that if the province of Quebec or a particular city wishes to establish a different set of conditions for the citizens they represent, why, for heaven's sake, would the government stand in the way? It is the same taxpayer. It has already been paid for once. The Conservatives are often happy to say that it is one taxpayer. Yes, I agree, this has been paid for. Why are they asking Quebec to pay for it again?

The second piece in this is important, which is the notion around liability. The gun owners whom I have been speaking with over the last number of months have said if there is no registration whatsoever, even at point of sale, and if the gun is then stolen or bequeathed, there is no record of its transfer and the gun is later used in the commission of a crime, how does the original owner prove it?

How does the original owner verify that he or she had nothing to do with that crime? This is an increasingly important issue for the same law-abiding gun owners we have talked about.

• (1630)

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to the hon. member's speech, specifically when he talked about the value as opposed to the cost. I would remind the hon. member that costs and values are not always aligned. A \$2 billion cost does not mean it was worth that.

I picked up on one comment. The hon. member said that some police officers have spoken off the record. Let me quote from a letter sent by a constituent of mine who encouraged me to read this. It states:

I am a serving Policeman and have been for over 23 years. I am a front line cop whose career has been dedicated to hunting and capturing society's worst. For the past 12 years, I have worked exclusively on a big city (SWAT) Team and have arrested countless rapists, armed robbers, armed drug dealers, violent gang members, and murderers...I know very little about running a Police department, writing traffic tickets, lifting fingerprints, or investigating shop-lifters...I do know about hunting armed violent desperate men—and I do it very well. The long gun registry does ZERO to help me do my job. 99% of front line cops that I know feel the same way.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order. There may be questions from other hon. members and we have to get to them.

The hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, what we have on the record is from the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police. That seems to be —

Hon. Ted Menzies: That's exactly what—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: My friend can choose another moment to enter this debate, if he would like.

The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police represents its members, as my friend represents the people in his riding in the House of Commons. I suspect that 100% of his constituents do not agree with everything he has uttered. So too is it in every situation and association. Of course, there are going to be dissenting views. No one suggested otherwise.

When we ask the government what it will cost to delete the records, it says it does not know and does not care. As the Minister of Finance's assistant, one would think he would be concerned as someone who manages the country's books. There is a big question mark over what it will cost to eliminate it.

Again, it is all one taxpayer. If the people of Quebec have already paid for this and they want the data, it is their data, and they should have it. The Privacy Commissioner says it is okay. The finance minister should say the same thing and get off his ideological horse and listen to some reason. It is a good piece of logic to follow.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before resuming debate, it is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Etobicoke North, The Environment; the hon. member for Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, Flooding in Montérégie.

[English]

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am extremely pleased today to speak in favour of law-abiding gun owners.

I am also pleased to speak on behalf of the many Canadian taxpayers who are asking the government for nothing more than to spend tax dollars wisely. I am pleased to support the bill and I know voters back home are watching to ensure I do.

For many years now Canadians who use rifles and shotguns for legitimate reasons have protested against the long-gun registry and increasingly, over the last number of years, taxpayers have joined their protest.

[Translation]

Last May, our government again promised to get rid of the long gun registry once and for all. In the throne speech, we repeated this promise. Now, with this bill, I am proud to say that we are fulfilling that promise.

[English]

First, let us look at the bill in the context of our crime reduction strategy.

The proposed legislation would build on a series of initiatives to make our streets safer that have extended over the last five years. During this time, our government created mandatory minimum prison sentences for serious gun crimes. We have created a new broad-based offence to target drive-by and other intentional shootings. We have also given the provinces and territories more money to enforce the law.

The bill is part of our larger agenda to make our communities and neighbourhoods safer. It is also part of an agenda to spend tax dollars in a way that would respect the priorities of Canadians.

The legislation would end the discrimination against rural Canadians for their use of shotguns and rifles. In doing so, it would eliminate the element of the current gun control system that is both wasteful and ineffective. It would also close a sorry chapter in the decade-long abuse dished out to taxpayers.

Moreover, it would retain the best parts of existing legislation which would allow us to focus our attention against real threats to public safety.

• (1635)

[Translation]

I would like to present some evidence in support of these arguments. However, I would first like to quickly explain why the bill before us is not necessary and is long overdue.

[English]

There is no evidence that the long gun registry keeps front line police officers safer, nor is there evidence to highlight just how the registration has prevented crime or reduced crime in this country.

This is not about having a system that is better than nothing. The registry has been a failure. It has failed law-abiding Canadians, it has failed the public and, importantly, it has failed Canadian taxpayers.

Points of Order

Let me explain. The current law targets duck hunters and farmers by making criminals of law-abiding citizens. Moreover, there is no evidence that it has prevented a crime before the fact. Police chiefs who support the registry have in fact been asked about this, yet have been unable to come up with examples where the registry was used to foil a crime.

For all this, the price has been an astounding \$2 billion. Yet, earlier today, the member for Winnipeg North disputed this figure, saying it was not grounded in reality. This is an outrageous statement.

Let us go over the history very quickly. When the registry was set up, initially, the then Liberal justice minister claimed it would cost Canadian taxpayers \$2 million. Yet the price went up and up and eventually hit \$2 billion. In fact, the Auditor General herself concluded the price at over \$1 billion and then gave up the audit, simply because the paperwork was not there for her to complete it at the time. I do not think there is much of a dispute out there that the registry has cost \$2 billion. For an hon. member to suggest otherwise is not being truthful with Canadian taxpayers.

Thus, in addition to being costly and ineffective, the long gun registry places an unfair burden on law-abiding citizens, people who use rifles and shotguns to protect livestock or provide food for their families, or who might use long guns for sports, such as wild game hunting and target shooting.

[Translation]

Ponds and woodlands in Canada's rural areas are often far from the scene of a crime. Forcing farmers and hunters to register their long guns has not protected Canadians living in urban areas. There is no evidence to support the long gun registry, but there is ample proof that the registry is ineffective.

[English]

Let me take a few moments to break some time-honoured myths.

First, most violent gun crime in Canada does not involve long guns. Between 1975 and 2006, for example, Statistics Canada showed the use of rifles or shotguns in homicides declined by a remarkable 86%. In 2006 alone, three times as many victims were killed with a handgun than with rifles or shotguns. These statistics are no aberration. In 2009, out of the 179 firearm homicides, almost 60% of the crimes were committed with handguns.

Points of Order

Furthermore, where long guns are actually used in violent crimes, the vast majority of the firearms are unregistered. Between 2005 and 2009, for example, police recovered 253 firearms that were used to commit a homicide. Of these, less than one-third, 31%, were actually listed with the Canadian firearms registry. Members opposite may say that one out of three is not bad, but again, let me highlight that these guns were only seized after the crimes were committed, not beforehand.

What all this means is that law-abiding citizens are spending time and money to comply with an ineffective law. At the same time, and this should come as no surprise to anyone in the House, criminals with guns simply ignore the registry. The result is an ineffective system that discriminates for no good reason, except perhaps prejudice against legitimate long gun owners, and it does nothing to stem the tide of illegal firearms crossing the border.

Again, what did the taxpaying public receive for all of this? An astounding bill for \$2 billion. Imagine for a moment if that money had been spent instead on front-line policing, health care, the Canadian Forces, or even going after illegal guns. Members can pick whatever they like, but I cannot think of a program in the last 20 years that similarly failed to deliver on its promise.

With all this in mind, let me recap the provisions of the new bill and how it will address these issues. The most important component of Bill C-19, and the one that has been so long awaited, is the end of the registration for non-restricted firearms. At the same time, the bill will retain the gun licensing system. Licences will still be required to own any type of firearm. An applicant will still need to undergo a background check and pass a firearms safety course. In addition, owners of restricted and prohibited firearms will still need to register these weapons through the RCMP. As such, we would continue controlling the use of restricted and prohibited firearms, such as handguns, which are by far the firearms of choice in the commission of a homicide.

Finally, the bill would address a very important issue that flows from our promises. As members can imagine, the registry has demanded mountains of paperwork from law-abiding citizens. This has long been a source of concern. Canadians are concerned about what will happen to these records. Will they be taken over by another level of government, or by a federal agency?

Earlier I mentioned the voters in New Brunswick Southwest. During the campaign the Conservatives promised to end the long gun registry. When asked what would happen to the data, I replied it would be deleted. After all, the data is the registry. I cannot credibly claim to oppose the registry yet quietly turn around and keep the information. This would make our pledge meaningless. We will instead preserve the privacy of these Canadians and end this failed debacle once and for all. I am pleased to say that the bill requires the elimination of all records related to the registry of non-restricted firearms contained within the Canadian firearms registry.

The proposed legislation is long overdue. It promises to eliminate a wasteful, ineffective long gun registry that penalizes law-abiding citizens and it will do so without weakening gun control. Instead, we can spend the millions we save each year on crime prevention programs that will truly help make our communities safer.

In short, the bill would replace waste and ineffectiveness with efficiency and value for money. For all these reasons, I urge members of the House to join me and countless Canadian taxpayers in supporting this bill.

• (1640)

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, earlier I asked one of my own colleagues a question regarding the rhetoric around the fact that the Conservatives do not plan on changing the types of firearms that will be registered.

Unfortunately, firearms that used to be kept track of will no longer be kept track of, firearms such as the Ruger Mini-14, the semi-automatic that was used at École Polytechnique.

I understand that the government intends to end the long gun registry, but in doing so it will end our ability to keep track of these very dangerous weapons. Perhaps my friend across the way could tell me how many hunters in New Brunswick actually use the Ruger Mini-14 to go after ducks.

Mr. John Williamson: Mr. Speaker, I must confess I have no idea how many hunters use that particular weapon when hunting.

I also do not know if the hon. member missed question period earlier today when the Prime Minister responded to this point saying that this bill does not affect the system which determines which firearms are restricted and which are not. That system was set up by the previous government and it is one we continue to follow. We will listen to the experts on that. That component is not part of this bill.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member amazes me in how he joins the many who try to give the false impression that the firearms registry cost close to \$2 billion, when we know that just is not true. Conservative members believe that if they repeat it enough times it will become true, but that is false information.

The reality is, in terms of the cost and implementation and putting it into place, over a 10-year period, it cost less than \$1 billion. I do not know where the member is getting his numbers. There must be a Conservative calculator at work.

We could talk about the G8. Let us remember that weekend for the leaders which cost three-quarters of a billion dollars, the Conservatives' three day party.

What is it that the member does not quite understand? Does he believe that the Auditor General was misleading the House, that the Auditor General has no credibility? The Auditor General said that the cost was less than \$1 billion over 10 years. Does the member not believe the independent Office of the Auditor General?

• (1645)

Mr. John Williamson: Mr. Speaker, that is a good point, but it is wrong.

The Auditor General gave up her study because she concluded the paper trail just was not there. She was not able to even—

An hon. member: I will show you the report.

Mr. John Williamson: I was there. I was in the room. That is why newspapers and media outlets across the country trumpet a \$2 billion cost to the registry.

An hon. member: Show us the \$2 billion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, order. The hon. member for New Brunswick Southwest has the floor. I do not know whether he has finished. If the hon. member is finished, we will carry on.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Crowfoot.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to continue along that whole vein of questioning.

I do recall that when Allan Rock began the registry, it was going to cost \$2 million. Soon after Anne McLellan came along and, with great gravity, said that the cost was \$80 million but we would have a registry. A few years later, we were into the hundreds of millions.

Certainly CBC did its research. It was the one that reported the \$2 billion cost. It understood that the Auditor General had shut down shop because of the lack of a paper trail, and said that the cost was well out of proportion.

We know that it has cost Canadians way too much. I will give the member an opportunity to comment on that.

Mr. John Williamson: Mr. Speaker, it is like the *Twilight Zone* here. The only members who seem to dispute the cost of the registry at \$2 billion are those in the rump party across. In four years if those members want to explain to Canadian taxpayers that they are going to set up the registry again and it is only going to cost a couple of million dollars, good luck with that, Charlie Brown.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to participate in the debate. I must confess that in the last few weeks leading up to Halloween and after, I feel like I have been participating in some kind of revenge of the Reform Party performance. The Wheat Board is gone and the gun registry is about to go. It is a strange form of triumphalism. My friend from Crowfoot is getting his exercise in applauding.

What Canadians are looking for is public policy that is based on evidence, based on the facts, based on a reasonable assessment of risk. They are looking for public policy that is based on the realities of the situation. They are looking for public policy that is based on a consistent sense that we have as a country, that what we can do to reduce violence and reduce the loss of life is worth doing as long as it is not too intrusive, not unreasonable, and is reasonably fair and equitable.

I am not here to defend all of the expenditures in the registry. I think the costs are way less than the numbers that have been thrown around by the government over a 10 year period. No doubt some of that money could have been spent differently and perhaps more wisely, but that really is not the issue. Those are now sunk costs. We are not going to get the money back. No effort by the Reform Party

Points of Order

on the other side is going to get it back. All the enthusiasm they have for the rights of gun owners is not going to change the situation.

We register our cars. In many cities we register our bicycles. We register our cats and our dogs. We register a great many things. If the government had its way, we would be registering our canoes, if anyone can believe it. There are lots of things that we register.

Why is the one thing that the Conservatives have now developed this intense ideological objection to is the notion that we would ask people to simply register their guns, when we know that guns, in addition to killing ducks, moose and other animals, also kill people? We also know that long guns, in the case of rural suicides for example, are used in suicide, and long guns are used in cases of domestic violence.

We know that last year when responding to calls involving domestic violence, 7,000 registered certificates were pulled after police officers attended on the scene involving domestic violence. When members opposite say that it has never stopped a crime, never reduced a crime, that it is expensive and ineffective, blah, blah, blah, the mantra the Conservatives use to describe it, the fact is it probably has saved some lives. The evidence would suggest that and certainly the evidence of those who are speaking in favour of it would suggest it as well.

• (1650)

[Translation]

We must consider Canadians' views based on the realities of the situation. Here is what Denis Côté, the president of the Fédération des policiers et policières municipaux du Québec, had to say:

Rifles and shotguns make up a substantial proportion of the guns recovered in crime in this country. They are the guns most often used to kill police officers, in domestic violence situations and in suicides, particularly those involving youths.

Mr. Côté was clear: police officers need this registry.

[English]

I am a practical guy, so when I talk to the chief of police in the city of Toronto, Vaughan or Markham, the first questions I always ask are: What about all the fuss on the gun registry? Is it useful? Do they need it? They have said, "Yes, we do. It does not save the world. It will not make all the difference. We cannot rely on it entirely. It is an imperfect vehicle but we need it, we use it and we do not want to lose it".

When I was premier, there was a terrible murder in Ontario of a young woman. Her mother, Priscilla de Villiers, became very active as an activist dealing with guns. She said:

The costs of maintaining the registry are modest—less than \$4 million a year—while the risks of eliminating the registry are enormous.

She asked a painful question, and I think members of the House need to listen to it:

Would a gun registry have saved my daughter or so many countless others across this country? We don't know.

She goes on to say:

No law can prevent all tragedies. But a gun control law which includes registration and is rigorously implemented makes it harder—not easier—for dangerous people to get firearms.

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We have the head of the police association in Quebec, the chiefs of police across the country, someone like Priscilla de Villiers and the emergency doctors saying the same thing.

Mr. Drummond, from the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians, an assistant coroner in Perth, Ontario, just down the highway, said:

So we will now all be unwilling participants in a social experiment that will undoubtedly place Canadian lives at risk. Our question to our government is that relative to the perceived inconvenience....

And that is really what members on the opposite are talking about. It is inconvenient.

He goes on to say:

...what will be the true cost, in direct human suffering, of their ideologically driven and scientifically bankrupt legislation. Canada's emergency physicians remain steadfastly supportive of the principles of the Firearms Act and the gun registry.

How many times have I heard the Minister of Public Safety say that he is speaking for victims? The ombudsman for victims, Sue O'Sullivan, stated categorically that she was in favour of the registry and thought it would save lives.

Just three weeks ago, we had a very moving debate in this House on suicide. If there is a gun around, registered or not, that gun could be used to take one's life. Kids can get access to it. The thing about the registry is that it is supposed to hold gun owners accountable for the use of the gun. To me, this is not an ideological question. It is a purely factual one. We spent the money and it is \$4 million a year.

Are we likely to see some lives lost as a result of greater access to firearms as a result of this repeal? I think anyone looking at it would say probably yes, and that is enough for me.

What really gets me about the government is that it is not enough for it to say that, as a government, it will not use the registry. It is not enough to say that, as a government, it does not think the registry is right. The government not only wants to control its mandate, it wants to control the future. Is will conduct a bonfire so that no one else will ever be able to do such a registry? That is what the minister said, "We want to stop any other government ever".

Is that based on evidence? What if we find that it is useful? What if we find other means of registering? What if we find less intrusive and less inconvenient ways of registering? Is the government saying that it will be opposed to that and stop that as well?

• (1655)

[Translation]

As my other colleague mentioned, this government is also saying that it will tell the Province of Quebec that it cannot do that either. We know that Quebec's justice minister, Mr. Fournier, clearly said that Quebec wanted to do so and that it wanted the means to do so.

[English]

I ask the government opposite to please abandon its ideological ways and stop pretending it can control the world, control all things and control the future. It should show a little humility in this legislation, bring it down to size and at least reflect the fact that most Canadians on this legislation do not actually agree with the government.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a couple of questions for leader of the third party. My first question has to do with the mandate that Canadians gave all of us in this House, some of us a stronger mandate than others in terms of the seats.

When we talk about the long gun registry and the view that Canadians across this country, from east to west to the north part of Canada, have had in opposition to this long gun registry, whether they were Conservative, NDP or Liberal, it was overwhelmingly opposed. When will the Liberals look at what Canadians want. Talk about defending ideology.

The other issue I would like the member to comment on is that the long gun registry does nothing to keep guns out of people's hands. He referred to suicide. How can the long gun registry keep any guns out of any individual's hands?

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Speaker, I will just relate the fact that I gave the hon. member. Perhaps she did not hear me when I said that, in responding to concerns about domestic violence, what I have been told, and based on reliable information that I have, is that police have pulled at least six thousand or seven thousand certificates. Therefore, they are pulling guns away from people who they think are likely to do harm in a domestic situation.

The member also raises a very interesting question about the nature of our mandate. Roughly 24% of Canadians, who were entitled to vote, voted for the party of the member opposite. I would strongly suggest that she not make the terrible mistake, which many governments have made over the course of history, of over-reading their mandate.

The member and her party should not over-read the mandate that they were given by the Canadian people. That would be a terrible—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please.

The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

• (1700)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have lived with the issue of the gun registry since it was implemented. We saw the ham-fisted way that it was brought in, which caused a great deal of alienation. I have to say that in my office over the last seven years the issues regarding the registry have dropped to zero. People are upset about the licensing. People are upset about the various processes. The questions we had about the registry have pretty much vanished.

In response to the Conservative member, I sat down with a police officer and told her that I needed an answer on whether she used the registry. She told me that, in a case of domestic violence, they need to know whether there are four or five guns in the house. She said that it was not enough to know that the person is a gun owner. She said that they need to know if there is a fifth gun and that, if they do not know where that fifth gun is, people die. That is what police officers in the city of Timmins told me to my face.

I would ask my honourable colleague why he thinks that the party opposite continually undermines the legitimacy of the police's point of view on this issue.

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Speaker, that will be a significant issue in the months ahead. Unfortunately, we have a government that has become captive to an ideology. When we actually look at it and talk to the police, we will get different opinions. My colleague from Macleod was raising an issue of a police officer in his constituency. I fully respect that from the Minister of State for Finance. There will be different opinions from police officers.

I can only tell members the overwhelming sentiment of the police in the city of Toronto and in most of the cities that I know in Ontario. They are strongly in favour of keeping the registry because they believe it saves lives and that it protects them better. They also believe that in situations, particularly in domestic situations, it is an important source of protection.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, earlier today, we heard the Conservatives playing up the issue of their majority, even though we know that the vast majority of Canadians did not vote for them. What is even more appalling is that destroying this data will set back our culture of protecting people when it comes to firearms. I wonder if my hon. colleague could talk about the importance of keeping the data so that the other provinces, like Quebec, can create their own registries, unless they too are stuck with a Conservative government.

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Speaker, in response to the question asked by my colleague from Bourassa, I would like to quote Ms. Stoddart, the Privacy Commissioner. She clearly said that nothing in the federal legislation prevents the federal government from sharing the data with provincial governments. She completely opposes the federal government's position. That is the reality.

All experts, including Sue O'Sullivan, who advocates for victims of crime, and Ms. Stoddart, the Privacy Commissioner, are clearly saying that the government's arguments are completely false.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I count this as an opportunity to again rise in this place to speak to Bill C-19, the ending of the long gun registry.

I will begin by thanking the member for Yorkton—Melville for his many long years of trying to get rid of the long gun registry. I also thank the former member of Parliament for Crowfoot, the one I followed, Mr. Jack Ramsay, who spent a lot of time working on Bill C-68 and also trying to get rid of the long gun registry.

As someone who is not only a farmer but who represents a vibrant and thriving farming community, I feel that it is important to ensure that my constituents' views are heard during the debate. In fact, I am very pleased to be able to chair the committee that will receive the legislation, Bill C-19, study it a bit more and report it, hopefully, back to the House.

I do not know how many of my hon. colleagues have had the pleasure of visiting Crowfoot. It is a riding that I am privileged to represent. My constituents work extremely hard and the folks there make a good, honest living, many of them off the land. My own family has been farming there for generations. In fact, my parents still live on the farm that my grandparents homesteaded over a century ago.

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Farmers in Crowfoot raise all manner of crops and livestock. On my own farm, we raise wheat, barley, canola and, before I was elected, we raised cattle and had a cow-calf operation.

However, whether it is cattle or any other livestock, or grain, I can tell members that they can count on one thing being virtually the same in my riding. Every farmer has a long gun. It is one of the tools that they use on their farming operation, whether it is to protect their stock from a coyote, shooting a skunk or shooting gophers so their horses do not break their legs in gopher holes when they are riding through the pasture, long guns are part of everyday life on the farm in Crowfoot.

That is why the long gun registry has been such a thorn in people's sides for many years. For too long, the law-abiding farmers and hunters in my constituency have been made to feel like they have been doing something wrong simply for owning a long gun. They are burdened. They are burdened by the paperwork and by the cost of registry. They are burdened by the fact that many of them question whether they are abiding the very letter of the law. They are burdened by the very suggestion that by owning a shotgun or a rifle, even perhaps a .22, somehow, in the eyes of some politicians, they are made to feel like a criminal.

At the same time, these same law-abiding farmers in my riding open the newspaper every day and are confronted with stories about gun crime in cities across the country. These crimes are being committed by thugs and gang members. After one of those criminal activities takes place, they listen to the Liberals or the NDP talk about the reason that we need the long gun registry. The farmers and the ranchers in my constituency sit back and say, "Listen. I've never broken the law in my life. Why am I being thrown into the same conversation with these thugs and criminals when they talk about the registry and long guns?"

There are crimes being committed with illegal handguns and weapons that have been stolen or smuggled in from across the border but the opposition says that it is all a gun issue.

The good folks of my riding look at these stories and wonder why they are being penalized for crimes committed so far away by people so very different from them. They wonder what this place is doing to target those criminals, because the long gun registry will not stop them.

• (1705)

We have yet to see any evidence that the long gun registry actually prevents gun crime from happening. It does not prevent guns from being used in a violent manner. It does not stop illegal firearms from getting into the hands of criminals. It does not stop the smuggling of them across the border in the trunk of someone's car who is involved in organized crime. All it does is provide a list of all law-abiding hunters, farmers and sports shooters. All it does is provide a list of all those who own firearms. It provides a list how many firearms are in a farmer's farmhouse. It provides a list as to the types and models of firearms that an individual has.

Points of Order

Like my colleagues on this side of the House, I can see there is a fundamental problem with the long gun registry. It targets the wrong people. It targets people like farmers in my riding of Crowfoot. It targets those who have never perpetrated a criminal offence. It targets the farmer who picks up that 22, puts it into his halfton and rides out to the pasture to shoot gophers and rodents, which the member for Vegreville—Wainwright has been unable to kill with strychnine. That is the problem. At the same time, it does nothing to prevent the gun crime that is happening in cities across our country.

That is why I am adding my support to Bill C-19 today. The first speech I ever gave in the House was on Bill C-68 or the long gun registry. It has been 11 years and I still believe this as much or more than I did when I started.

Bill C-19 is straightforward legislation. Through the bill, our government will scrap the long gun registry. The bill would remove the requirement for law-abiding hunters and farmers to register their unrestricted long guns. It would ensure that the data in the registry would be destroyed. I applaud our government for doing that. In doing so, we will be ending over a decade and a half of injustice and of targeting the wrong people on gun crime.

At the same time, Bill C-19 would keep in place the regulations for restricted and prohibited firearms, such as handguns and semi-automatic rifles. These are the firearms that we read about in the media and which are used to perpetrate crime. These are the guns that are getting into the hands of criminals and being used on innocent Canadians. Putting the focus on long guns and law-abiding hunters and farmers who use them is simply misdirected attention that should be elsewhere.

Speaking of resources, I also want to mention something else I hear a lot about in my riding. People in the riding of Crowfoot, as do most in rural Canada, play by the rules. There is a lot of outrage over the sheer waste that we have seen with the long gun registry. The previous Liberal government originally said that the cost would be \$2 million, then a year later it would be \$80 million, then Anne McLellan said \$300 million and then \$700 million. Now it is over \$2 billion. That is too much waste for no reason at all.

The member for Toronto Centre said that if the registry saved only one life, it would be worth it. That \$2 billion could have saved many lives if we had been able to get more resources out on the streets, more police officers on the streets, and if we had been able to crack down on crime like some of our other crime bills have done. That is way too much waste for little or no value.

Our government believes in taking real action to keep Canadians safer, to hold criminals accountable. That is why we have delivered tough on crime legislation to crack down on those who are targeting law-abiding Canadians.

We passed the Tackling Violent Crime Act, which delivered: longer mandatory minimum sentences for gun crimes; tougher new rules for bail for serious weapons; mandatory minimum sentences for drive-by shootings; tougher laws to combat organized crime; and mandatory minimum sentences for the use of a firearm in the commission of an offence.

This is the type of crime fighting measures this government is putting before Canadians and before the House. They are crime measures that are focused on the criminal and on criminal activity.

That is what this government is doing. We are committed to keeping its promise. We are committed to living up to those campaign policies and promises that we have made. We realize this long gun registry has been a colossal failure and we will be so pleased when we see the end of it.

• (1710)

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague's speech was very passionate. On the gun registry, I want to focus on the destruction of data that we already have. I realize the Conservatives have a majority and will pass this legislation. My appeal to colleagues across the floor is surely we will not be the kind of country that will destroy data that police officers tell us can be of use to them. Also, some provinces say that they want to use that data to have a registry.

For a government that says that it will be heavy on fighting crime, why is it willing to destroy not only one of the tools in a policeman's toolkit, but also one of the tools in the hands of RCMP officer?

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Speaker, I chair the committee on public safety and national security. I hear the NDP members in that committee when we discuss pardons. One of the things they want more than anything else is to be certain that the information that links a criminal with a criminal record is completely destroyed. What happens if an individual comes to a border crossing and that information is still in some data system and some other country has it? They have asked for that information to be destroyed to help the criminal.

We want the data destroyed so the registry cannot be reused and the old information that is redundant and poor in a way cannot be used to build another boondoggle.

• (1715)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): It being 5:15 p.m., pursuant to an order made Thursday, October 27 it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill now before the House.

The question is on the amendment. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those in favour of the amendment will please say ye.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Call in the members.

• (1755)

[Translation]

(The House divided on the amendment, which was negated on the following division:)

(Division No. 48)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)
 Angus
 Atamanenko
 Bélanger
 Bennett
 Blanchette
 Boivin
 Boulterice
 Braham
 Byrne
 Casey
 Charlton
 Choquette
 Cleary
 Comartin
 Cotler
 Cuzner
 Day
 Dionne Labelle
 Doré Lefebvre
 Duncan (Etobicoke North)
 Easter
 Foote
 Freeman
 Garneau
 Genest
 Giguère
 Goodale
 Grogulé
 Harris (St. John's East)
 Hughes
 Julian
 Kellway
 Lapointe
 Latendresse
 LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
 Leslie
 MacAulay
 Marston
 Masse
 May
 McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
 Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
 Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
 Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
 Mulcair
 Nantel
 Pacetti
 Péclet
 Plamondon
 Rac
 Raynault
 Rousseau
 Sandhu
 Scarpaleggia
 Sgro
 (sor)
 Sims (Newton—North Delta)
 St-Denis
 Stoffer
 Thibeault
 Tremblay
 Valerieote — 123

Andrews
 Ashton
 Aubin
 Bellavance
 Benskin
 Blanchette-Lamothe
 Borg
 Boutin-Sweet
 Brosseau
 Caron
 Casey
 Chicoine
 Christopherson
 Coderre
 Côté
 Crowder
 Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
 Dewar
 Donnelly
 Dubé
 Dussault
 Eyking
 Fortin
 Fry
 Garrison
 Genest-Jourdain
 Godin
 Gravelle
 Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
 Iltis
 Jacob
 Karygiannis
 Lamouroux
 Larose
 Laverdière
 LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
 Liu
 Mai
 Martin
 Mathysen
 McGuinly
 Michaud
 Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
 Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
 Mourani
 Murray
 Nunez-Melo
 Papillon
 Pilon
 Quach
 Ravignat
 Regan
 Saganash
 Savoie
 Schlah
 Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
 Sitsabaicsan
 Stewart
 Sullivan
 Toone
 Turnel

Ablonczy
 Adler
 Albas
 Alexander
 Allison
 Ambrose
 Andersson
 Aspin
 Bateman
 Bernier
 Blaney
 Boughen
 Breikinreuz
 Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
 Bruinoooge
 Calandra
 Cannan
 Carrie
 Chong
 Clement
 Davidson
 Del Mastro
 Dreeshen
 Dykstra
 Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
 Flaherty
 Galipeau
 Gill
 Goguen
 Goodyear
 Gourde
 Harper
 Hawn
 Hiebert
 Hloback
 Holder
 Jean
 Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
 Kerr
 Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
 Lauzon
 Leitch
 Leung
 Lobb
 Lumey
 Mayes
 McLeod
 Menzies
 Miller
 Moore (Fundy Royal)
 Norlock
 O'Neill Gordon
 Opitz
 Payne
 Poilievre
 Rajotte
 Reid
 Richards
 Rickford
 Schellenberger
 Shea
 Smith
 Sorenson
 Storseth
 Tilson
 Toews
 Trotter
 Twoced
 Valcourt
 Van Loan
 Wallace
 Warkentin
 Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)
 Weston (Saint John)
 Wilks
 Wong
 Yelich
 Young (Vancouver South)

Points of Order

NAYS

Members

Adams
 Aglukkaq
 Albrecht
 Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
 Ambler
 Anders
 Armstrong
 Baird
 Benoit
 Bezan
 Block
 Braid
 Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
 Brown (Barrie)
 Butt
 Calkins
 Carmichael
 Chisu
 Clarke
 Daniel
 Dechert
 Devolin
 Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
 Fantino
 Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
 Fletcher
 Gallant
 Glover
 Goldring
 Gosal
 Grewal
 Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
 Hayes
 Hilley
 Hloepncr
 James
 Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
 Kent
 Komarnicki
 Lake
 Leaf
 Lemieux
 Lizon
 Lukiwski
 MacKenzie
 McColeman
 Menegakis
 Merrifield
 Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
 Nicholson
 O'Connor
 Oda
 Paradis
 Penashue
 Preston
 Rathgeber
 Rempel
 Richardson
 Saxton
 Secback
 Shipley
 Sopuck
 Stanton
 Sweet
 Toet
 Trost
 Truppe
 Uppal
 Van Kesteren
 Vellacott
 Warawa
 Watson
 Williamson
 Woodworth
 Young (Oakville)
 Zimmer — 154

Points of Order

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the amendment lost.

The next question is on the main motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion, the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

• (1805)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 49)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy
Adler
Albas
Alexander
Allison
Ambrose
Anderson
Aspin
Bateman
Bernier
Blaney
Boughen
Breitkreuz
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Bruinooze
Calandra
Cannan
Carrie
Chong
Clement
Davidson
Del Mastro
Dreeschen
Dykstra
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Flaherty
Galipeau
Gill
Goguen
Goodyear
Gourde
Harper
Hawn
Hichert
Hoback
Holder
James
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kent
Komarnicki
Lake
Leef
Lemieux
Lizon
Adams
Aglukkaq
Albrecht
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Ambler
Anders
Armstrong
Baird
Benoit
Bezan
Block
Braid
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)
Butt
Calkins
Carmichael
Chisu
Clarke
Daniel
Dechert
Devolin
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Fantino
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Fletcher
Gallant
Glover
Goguen
Goldring
Gosal
Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hayes
Hillier
Hoeppner
Hyer
Jean
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kerr
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lauson
Leitch
Leung
Lobb

Lukiwski
MacKenzie
McColeman
Menegakis
Merrifield
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Nicholson
O'Connor
Oda
Paradis
Penashuc
Preston
Rajotte
Reid
Richards
Rickford
Schellenberger
Shea
Smith
Sorenson
Storseth
Tilson
Toews
Trottier
Twced
Valcourt
Van Loan
Wallace
Warkentin
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sca to Sky Country)
Weston (Saint John)
Wilks
Wong
Yclich
Young (Vancouver South)
Lunney
Mayes
McLeod
Menzies
Miller
Norlock
O'Neill Gordon
Opitz
Payne
Poilievre
Rafferty
Rathgeber
Rempel
Richardson
Saxton
Sechuck
Shipley
Sopuck
Stanton
Sweet
Toet
Trost
Truppe
Uppal
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Warawa
Watson
Williamson
Woodworth
Young (Oakville)
Zimmer— 156

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)
Angus
Atamanenko
Bélanger
Bennett
Blanchette
Boivin
Boulerville
Brahm
Byrne
Casey
Charlton
Choquette
Cleary
Comartin
Cotler
Cuzzner
Day
Dionne Labelle
Doré Lefebvre
Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Easter
Foote
Freeman
Garneau
Genest
Giguère
Goodale
Grogulé
Harris (St. John's East)
Hughes
Julian
Kellway
Lapointe
Latendresse
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
Leslie
MacAulay
Marston
Masse
May
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
Andrews
Ashton
Aubin
Bellavance
Benskin
Blanchette-Lamothe
Borg
Boutin-Sweet
Brossseau
Caron
Cash
Chicoine
Christopherson
Coderre
Côté
Crowder
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Dewar
Donnelly
Dubé
Dussault
Eyking
Fortin
Fry
Garrison
Genest-Jourdain
Godin
Gravelle
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Hsu
Jacob
Karygiannis
Lamoureux
Larose
Laverdière
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Liu
Mai
Martin
Mathysen
McGuinly
Michaud
Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)

Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	Mourani
Mulcair	Murray
Nantel	Nunez-Melo
Pacetti	Papillon
Péctet	Pilon
Plamondon	Quach
Rac	Ravignat
Raynault	Regan
Roussseau	Saganash
Sandhu	Savoie
Scarpaleggia	Sellah
Sgro	Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
sor)	
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	Sitsabaiesan
St-Denis	Stewart
Stoffer	Sullivan
Thibeault	Toone
Tremblay	Turnel
Valeriote — 123	

PAIRED

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

[English]

Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

(Motion accepted to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

* * *

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—ASBESTOS

The House resumed from October 31 consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion.

• (1815)

[Translation]

(The House divided on the motion, which was negated on the following division:)

(Division No. 50)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews
Angus	Ashton
Atamanenko	Aubin
Béanger	Bennett
Benskin	Bevington
Blanchette	Blanchette-Lamothe
Boivin	Borg
Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet
Brahmi	Brossseau
Byrne	Caron
Casey	Cash
Charlton	Chicoine
Choquette	Christopherson
Cleary	Coderre
Comartin	Côté
Cotler	Crowder
Cullen	Cuzner
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Day
Dewar	Dionne Labelle
Donnelly	Doré Lefebvre
Dubé	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Dussault	Easter
Eyking	Footc
Freeman	Fry

Garneau	Garrison
Genest	Genest-Jourdain
Giguère	Godin
Goodale	Gravelle
Groulx	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Harris (St. John's East)	Hsu
Hughes	Hyer
Jacob	Julian
Karygiannis	Kellway
Lamoureux	Lapointe
Larose	Latendresse
Laverdière	LcBlanc (Beauséjour)
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)	Lcslic
Liu	MacAulay
Mai	Marston
Martin	Masse
Mathysen	May
McGuinity	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Michaud	Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)	Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)	Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Mulcair	Murray
Nantel	Nunez-Melo
Pacetti	Papillon
Péctet	Pilon
Quach	Rac
Rafferty	Ravignat
Raynault	Regan
Roussseau	Saganash
Sandhu	Savoie
Scarpaleggia	Sellah
Sgro	Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
sor)	
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	Sitsabaiesan
St-Denis	Stewart
Stoffer	Sullivan
Thibeault	Toone
Tremblay	Turnel
Valeriote — 123	

NAYS

Members

Adams
Aglukkaq
Albrecht
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Ambler
Anders
Armstrong
Baird
Bellavance
Bernier
Blaney
Boughen
Breitkreuz
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Bruinooqe
Calandra
Cannan
Carrie
Chong
Clement
Dechert
Devolin
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Fantino
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Fletcher
Gallant
Glover
Goldring
Gosal
Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hayes
Hoback
James
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kent
Komamicki
Lake
Leef

Private Members' Business

Leitch	Lemieux
Leung	Lizon
Lobb	Lukiwski
Lunney	MacKenzie
Mayes	McColeman
McLeod	Mengakiss
Merzdes	Merrifield
Miller	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
O'Neill Gordon	Oda
Opitz	Paradis
Payne	Penashuc
Plamondon	Poileivre
Preston	Rathgeber
Reid	Rempel
Richards	Richardson
Rickford	Saxton
Schellenberger	Sechack
Shea	Shipley
Smith	Sopuck
Sorensen	Stanton
Storseth	Sweet
Tilson	Toet
Toews	Trost
Trotter	Truppe
Tweed	Uppal
Valcourt	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vellacott
Wallace	Warawa
Warkentin	Watson
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	
Wilks	Williamson
Wong	Woodworth
Yelich	Young (Oakville)
Young (Vancouver South)	Zimmer— 152

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP) moved that Bill C-290, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (sports betting), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, Bill C-290 is a very short bill; basically one paragraph and a little over one line. If it were to ultimately become law, it would delete one section of the Criminal Code. The overall theme of the bill is to deal with a problem that we have in the country with regard to gaming, specifically being able to bet on sporting events.

As it is now, paragraph 207(4)(b) of the Criminal Code prohibits the gaming on a single sports event in Canada. The effect of that does have some very serious consequences and I will go into that in more detail. However, by way of introduction, the primary purpose behind this bill is twofold: first, to create greater employment opportunities in the gaming industry in Canada and in all the provinces who pick this up; and second, at least as important, it is a blow against organized crime that has captured, controls and is making huge profits from it, as ascertained by all the reports.

It is important to set this in a historical context. If we go back and study this closely, the laws on gaming in this country go back to the

1600s in England. I forget who the king was at the time, but it was in a period of time when he was very worried about his military gambling excessively. Laws were then passed in Westminster to prohibit all gambling in the country.

Over the centuries we have eroded that position. In fact, to follow the history in my riding, my predecessor, Shaughnessy Cohen, moved a similar amendment to the Criminal Code that allowed for betting at roulette tables, which was prohibited at the time. It allowed for roulette tables to come into casinos in the country. Following in that tradition, this is one of those periods of time when we should have our criminal law catch up with the reality of what is happening in our society.

In 1985 the federal government effectively gave up the administration of gaming operations to the provinces. It was one of those periods of time when there was some trade-offs going on with regard to revenue sources. This was a mechanism for the federal government to create new revenue sources for the provinces. Since that time a number of provinces have moved into gaming in a variety of ways: lotteries, casinos, additional betting being allowed at racetracks, and we can go down the list.

The role that gaming plays in provincial revenues has become quite significant. It is now literally billions of dollars across the country. In some cases, provinces have declined to take on those operations, but in other cases, provinces have taken them on wholeheartedly and have expanded their revenue base as a result.

• (1820)

To the point where we are with this particular expansion, the provinces would determine how they would implement this. From talking to various provincial administrations, there is a variety of suggestions if the bill becomes law, but ultimately the provision of gaming on single sporting events would vary across the country.

For instance, one province is considering allowing the casinos operated by first nations to take this type of gaming under their control. Obviously, the province would still administer it, but the bulk of the revenue would go to the casinos operated by first nations.

One province in particular is thinking of a very broad expansion using the British model. The gaming would take place in a variety of settings in that province.

In my home province of Ontario, as I understand it at this point, the primary thrust would be to allow the large commercial casinos, the casinos operated for charitable purposes that are smaller operations and potentially the racetracks, to do the administration. It would not expand it into the broader society as some of the other provinces are considering.

Whatever the model is, it is determined by the individual provinces, and some provinces may not take it up at all.

I would note at this point that both the Province of Ontario and the Province of British Columbia are on record with letters to the federal justice minister asking him to proceed with this type of amendment. The government up to this point has not proceeded that way, although I am expecting, and I may be overly optimistic because this is a private member's bill, substantial support from the government side as well as from our colleagues in the Liberal Party.

I will turn now to the real thrust behind this and I will deal with the criminal element first. There is no question that this type of gaming is illegal in Canada as well as in all of the United States, except for Nevada, where it is in fact legal. The casinos in Nevada do allow for single event betting. However, all of the other states and Canada prohibit it.

The end result of that prohibition has been that organized crime has moved into this field in a very big way. We have estimates from the U.S. of revenues coming in to organized crime at a minimum of \$80 billion a year. I will repeat that, because when I say that, most people think I said "million", but I said "billion". At the low end it is \$80 billion, with the estimate running to \$380 billion to \$400 billion at the high end. That is in the United States. With some of the information we have from our security services in Canada, the estimate is that a minimum of \$10 billion is wagered in Canada each year, and it may be as high as \$40 billion. That is the type of revenue we are talking about.

All of that money is going into the hands of organized crime. We do not believe that any substantive amount is going into other people's hands. It is controlled by the large criminal organizations, most of which are based in the U.S., but some of which are based here in Canada.

Some of this betting is also taking place offshore through the Internet. A number of those Internet sites are located in the Caribbean, where there is no ability for either the Canadian government or the U.S. government to thwart that type of activity over the Internet.

It is a situation where this activity is going on. Certainly there are people who argue that we are just expanding the ability of people to become problem gamblers. I do not believe that to be the case at all. This gambling is going on right now, all within the control of organized crime as best we can determine.

We are talking about taking it out of the hands of those in organized crime, a strong way to reduce the revenue they are generating, and move it into the hands, in our case, of provincial governments. Let them use the revenue for the purposes of operating their government.

The second reason I have been an advocate for this legislation is the potential it has for creating employment. Obviously it would create a substantial amount of revenue for provinces, but in addition, we ultimately would see some of that as jobs are created at the federal level.

● (1825)

As recently as September, the Canadian Gaming Association, which has a number of gaming groups around the country as part of its association, did an economic analysis of what would occur if this were allowed to become law in Canada and we could have this type of gaming going on. It is of particular interest to me because the city of Windsor is the host of one of the largest casinos in the country; I think it is the largest, but there may be one or two of the same size.

The estimate was that the number of additional jobs or the securing of existing jobs in the Windsor casino, just that one casino, would be somewhere between 150 to 250. Some jobs would be saved because there have been some layoffs recently because of

Private Members' Business

competition that we are getting from the U.S. side and just because of the general economic downturn that we have had recently, but we would secure those jobs or create new jobs.

The association did a similar analysis for the casinos, interestingly, in Niagara Falls, the home riding of the Minister of Justice, and came up with a similar number of jobs being secured or jobs that would be created. That is true across a number of other areas in Ontario and elsewhere in the country.

There is a very strong reason from that vantage point, not only the revenue that this would create for the provinces but, more specifically, the jobs it would create at the lower level.

I have spoken to some of my colleagues who have charity casinos in their ridings. They feel that a similar impact would occur. A number of these are situated along the U.S.-Canada border, and we draw a lot of trade from the U.S. side. For instance, in the casino in Windsor, the estimates continue to run that somewhere between 75% and 80% of the revenue comes from the U.S. side of the border. That is true even for some of the charity casinos. It is certainly true for Niagara.

The important part is that allowing for this type of gaming would attract tourist trade into Canada. People would come over. I always tell the story that I happened to be in Las Vegas when one of the national basketball tournaments was on. I remember sitting in Caesars, actually on the floor with all these students who were watching the game, knowing that they had placed bets on the game. That is the kind of tourism we would be attracting on our side of the border.

Let me indicate the support that we have had. I have already indicated that both the Province of Ontario and the Province of British Columbia have sought this amendment from the federal government. A number of municipalities, including the City of Niagara Falls and the City of Windsor, the Canadian Gaming Association, the Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority, the Atlantic Lottery Corporation, the Nova Scotia Gaming Corporation, the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation, and the Saskatchewan Gaming Corporation have all indicated their support. They have an appreciation from working in this field and this part of the economy of what the consequences would be and are quite supportive that this would go ahead.

I will summarize the reasons for supporting this bill. It would be a blow against organized crime and a potential job creator for the economy. As well, it would move additional revenue into the hands of the provinces. It is a very simple amendment. It does not require a great deal of understanding of what we are doing or why. I would encourage all members of the House to support this bill.

● (1830)

Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like thank the hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh for sponsoring this bill. I can advise him that I will be voting in favour of his bill.

Private Members' Business

I am sure the member has researched the history of this in drafting his bill. Would he advise me as to why an exception was made in the Criminal Code for a race or a fight or a single sports event? I am curious as to what the historical significance is or why the distinction was made for single events.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Madam Speaker, I do not know the history of how it came about initially. I know why it has been preserved and that has been the fear, mostly coming from the U.S., that betting on a single sporting event would open up the possibility of professional players being bribed to throw a game.

When amendments like this have been proposed in a number of states in the U.S., that is always the kickback. It comes from professional sports organizations on the U.S. side. They push back out of the fear that somehow this will increase the likelihood of professional basketball, football or hockey players being more prone to being bribed to throw games. Those events can be bet on now. One just has to bet on three or five of them in a parlay type of arrangement.

If that kind of corruption is going to go on, it is as likely to go on under the existing provisions of the U.S. laws as it would be if we made this amendment.

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my question relates to our first nations communities.

I know it was referenced in the member's speech in a number of senses, but section 81 of the Indian Act allows for a band council to make bylaws in relation to the control of gaming and competitions. I was interested to hear my colleague from Windsor—Tecumseh indicate the support of one Indian gaming commission. There has also been an indication that one provincial gaming commission is going to work with first nations.

Could the member expand on the consultations and feedback and what impact there will be on first nations communities vis-à-vis their involvement in gaming?

• (1835)

Mr. Joe Comartin: Madam Speaker, I want to be clear on this. Even though that provision is in the Indian Act, first nations still require this amendment. Although they have the jurisdiction to pass bylaws, that does not override the Criminal Code. The Criminal Code has to be amended first before they can invoke that part of the legislation under the Indian Act.

To be more specific with regard to the member's question, the role first nations play will vary across the country. There is friction between some first nations gaming operations and the provinces in some cases. How this would be implemented, how extensively they would be involved, would end up being a negotiated arrangement between the particular province and the first nation that is operating a gaming operation in that province.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for his work on this file.

It is important to note that we are not condoning more gambling with this legislation. We are looking at making sure that we bring single game betting inside. It is something we currently cannot do, which many of us who have been involved in this did not know.

What could we do with the resources at the provincial and federal levels once this legislation is brought into effect?

Mr. Joe Comartin: Madam Speaker, what the revenue would be used for would be determined by the province in each particular case. In some cases, the gaming revenue is going into a province's general revenue fund. In other cases, as in my home province, the charity casinos receive it and it is distributed. The first nations at Rama get a substantial part of it. First nations will benefit from their part of this operation.

Mr. Robert Goguen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to support Bill C-290. This is a private member's bill which the member for Windsor—Tecumseh introduced in the House on September 28, 2011.

Bill C-290 would authorize a province or a territory to conduct single sport betting within the province or territory if it so chooses.

In order to better comprehend how this bill would modify the structure of the current provisions relating to gambling, I will briefly go through the history of the past and current Canadian laws in this area.

As members will notice, the gambling provisions in the Criminal Code are somewhat difficult to read and to understand. Nevertheless, a careful reading of these provisions shows that their basic structure is to prohibit all forms of gambling unless a particular form of gambling is specifically permitted by the Criminal Code.

[Translation]

Parliament has permitted such exceptions to the gambling offences as private bets that are made between individuals who are not in the business of betting. In Canada, we also have pari-mutuel betting on horse races, where the betting is conducted by a race association. Then there are lottery schemes that are conducted by a province or territory and the slightly narrower range of lottery schemes that are conducted by a licensee of a province or territory, such as a charitable organization.

Parliament has also authorized certain lottery schemes that are conducted on international cruise ships while in Canadian waters, if certain conditions are met.

[English]

Parliament included gambling offences when it enacted the first Criminal Code in Canada in 1892. There were some exceptions to the offences, primarily for bets made at a horse race. The provisions were expanded in the 1920s to include the exception for pari-mutuel betting on a horse race. That made it possible to put all the money bet on a horse race into a pool and the winners would share in the pool based upon how much they had bet on a horse that finished in a spot that entitled bettors on that horse to share the winnings.

A most significant change to the gambling provisions occurred in 1969 when the provinces, territories and the federal government were each authorized to conduct a range of lottery schemes. This followed closely on the heels of the reintroduction of legal lottery ticket operations in some U.S. states.

In 1985, Parliament withdrew the Criminal Code authorizations that existed from 1969 for the federal government to conduct a lottery scheme and it went through the authorizations that existed from 1983 for the federal government to conduct a pool betting operation. This left the field of lottery schemes exclusively to the operation by provincial and territorial governments and their licensees.

• (1840)

[Translation]

It was in 1998 that Parliament authorized international cruise ships to continue operating their lottery schemes when they enter Canadian waters and up until the first port of call, if certain conditions are met. That change was made at the request of provinces in order to encourage the international cruise ships to sail to Canadian ports.

Some provinces have offered a particular kind of sports betting as a form of lottery scheme to their residents. The structure of this betting requires the bettor to select a number of games and predict the correct outcome for those games.

[English]

Bill C-290 would make it possible for a province or territory to conduct a lottery scheme that involves betting on single games. If Bill C-290 passes, I do not know if any bettors would still make bets on the outcomes of multiple games, but I would imagine that the vast majority of bettors would prefer to bet on a single game and its outcome.

Of course, it would be up to each province and territory to decide if it wanted to offer single sports betting, but that will be their decision.

Under section 207 of the Criminal Code, a province may operate a lottery scheme on or through a computer, but it cannot licence others to do so because single sport betting would, by necessity, require computer operation. Single event sport betting is something that the provinces and territories would conduct themselves because they may not licence others to conduct a lottery scheme that is conducted on or through a computer.

[Translation]

I want to mention that a province or territory could choose to locate a single sport event betting operation in a casino or at a race track, for example, and it could share the profits from the betting however it sees fit. Again, these would be matters for provincial or territorial decision-making. I am assuming that decisions would be made by a province or territory with the values and desires of their residents in mind. That includes keeping an eye open to the measures that are needed to prevent problem gambling.

[English]

I can appreciate that not everyone thinks that gambling is for them. However, it is my view that allowing single sport betting, even through a provincial lottery scheme, is far more appropriate than what is currently happening in this country. Betting with an illegal bookmaker is driving money to organized crime.

Private Members' Business

Bill C-290 is a response that would give the provinces and territories the choice as to whether they wish to join countries such as England where there is legalized single event betting on sports. I emphasize that the provinces and territories would be able to make that decision based on the particular circumstances within their jurisdiction.

The provinces and territories are best placed to determine public acceptance for single event betting and to implement measures for responsible betting. They have decades of experience in conducting a broad range of lottery schemes, from lottery tickets, to casinos with slots, table games and to betting on the outcomes of multiple sports events.

For those reasons, I support private member's Bill C-290 and I will be voting in favour of it.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank the Liberal Party for allowing me to go a little sooner so I can get to another meeting tonight. I appreciate the camaraderie in the House, which does happen in this place.

It is important to recognize the work of the member for Windsor—Tecumseh on Bill C-290. I commend him for his work. He has had this bill in the past and has brought it forth again. It is very timely.

When we think about private members' issues that we can bring forward as members, this is a very serious one because it is about the economy right now. It would provide some extra revenue for the gaming industry. Also, I do not think we should underestimate the issues with regard to organized crime. We are concerned about people with gambling addictions, but we know that sports wagering is taking place under the table, not just in Canada but across the globe. What is really important is that this would take away some of the financing from organized crime.

It is very appropriate that the member for Windsor—Tecumseh is doing this from a local perspective, because we have a casino in Windsor. Sports betting happens in the United States where people take advantage of it. People go to Las Vegas and other areas where they can bet. This would be a benefit because we have a lot of competition from the U.S. with the high Canadian dollar right now. Also, the U.S. is bringing in a series of measures to tax Canadians, and there are other border issues.

We have seen a diminishing tourism industry. The HST being implemented had an affect upon tourism in Canada. Dropping the GST rebate was another blow to the tourism industry. Therefore, it is very important for us to see this as an advantage for us to compete against the United States in the gaming market right now. The U.S. has made efforts and has pushed to bring in single sports betting venues but it has not done so yet, except in Nevada.

From a global perspective, the member for Windsor—Tecumseh is doing his job as a justice critic for the official opposition by bringing forth a solution and a way to tackle crime with regard to the revenue stream that we see happening in the underground economy. I applaud the member on both those fronts. I think that is important to recognize.

Private Members' Business

Sports betting should not be underestimated. We do not even know the full value of what is going on in terms of the estimates of organized crime and sports betting happening illegally. There have been some studies done and they vary wildly. Some say it is anywhere from \$80 billion to \$380 billion annually. That is a big spread, but it is a lot of money that is actually out there in the system. Even if we could take a fraction of that by moving on this, it would be important, not just with regard to the employment aspect but also for ensuring that organized crime does not have an extra revenue stream in its repertoire. That is something I think Canadians want to see happen.

It is important to get the bill to committee and, hopefully, through committee really quickly. The sooner we get to this the better.

Coming from the perspective of a border town like ours, Windsor and Essex county, we have seen first-hand the difficulty with the economy. I note that in the supporters of the bill there is the CAW, the city of Niagara Falls, the city of Windsor, the Canadian Gaming Association, the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Commission and several other provincial associations. One of the critical components of the bill is the way it would play itself out. Each province would have an opportunity to make its own decision. I am hoping that we will see the province of Ontario quickly grab onto this.

With reference to the challenges in a border community right now, this would be a shot in the arm for an area that has suffered quite a loss of jobs. I was on city council at the time when we tried to diversify the Windsor and Essex county area a number of years ago by moving into tourism. We were successful with a lot of different venues that we put forth but then there were other challenges. After 9/11, we saw the border change quite significantly. We now have more difficulty getting people to and from the border. This affects Americans coming into Canada as well as Canadians going out. We have extra taxes to pay and so forth. There were a few more problems for us.

We hear stories from the Americans that they feel hassled crossing the border back and forth, even by their own people. What has happened is that, with the artificially high dollar from the high petroleum industry exports that we are doing right now, we have lost. We have gone from basically 60¢ on the dollar when we brought in our tourism strategy, to parity or above. That is a significant shift over a small period of time.

• (1845)

We may think that eight to ten years is not that long, but it is when one is investing in a small business or in the tourism industry. This would provide a shot in the arm to attract visitors to come over.

One of the merits of the bill that is important to notice is that it acknowledges that the world is changing. When we brought the casino into Windsor, it did not have competition across the river but now it does. A series of Detroit casinos have now opened up. There are three casinos in particular, and there are also the aboriginal casinos that are in other parts of Michigan. We have a series of competition that we cannot deny.

In fact, if we walk down to the end of my street and look across the Detroit River, which is two miles, we can see one of the casinos there. Right across from the Windsor casino, Caesars, is the

Greektown casino, and not far from there is MGM Grand. Therefore, we have a significant reality to deal with in terms of competition. Offering a different product would be an essential component of protecting those jobs and once again seeing more visitors come over from the United States.

One of the benefits of living in a border society is that we often traverse back and forth for different products and for entertainment. For example, I go to the Detroit Lions game. I regularly cross the border to the United States to see its sports entertainment. Canadian dollars go over there on a regular basis. Many Windsors go over to see the Tigers, the Pistons, the Lions, all the different organizations that provide sports entertainment.

We would then be reciprocating a different product on this side. The bill by the member for Windsor—Tecomseh is very timely as we have been watching Ohio enter into this market as well. Ohio has now opened up a couple of casinos, which has taken away the destination component that was often important. We had a lot of coaches that would come in with people from Ohio who saw the better service they would get at the Windsor casino. Caesars' product is very good. The brand is terrific. It is the only one outside of the United States. The corporation has made an investment to bring in live entertainment and other initiatives to keep the economy going and keep the jobs at the Windsor casino. People from Ohio would get on a bus and did not mind taking the extra step to come over the border to get a better product.

Now, however, we are competing to get the people out of Ohio because they are staying there. They do not necessarily say, "Let's go to the casino. Are we going to Detroit or Windsor? Which one should we select" and then get on a tour package or drive down and cross over. It was less of a big deal because they were making that effort coming from Ohio anyway. The bill would provide an opportunity for that element to shine as well.

We have some unusual opportunities that will happen over the next number of years that will enhance transportation from Chicago to Detroit. We cannot underestimate that market. There are tens of millions of people who live in that catchment area. Right now, they are moving forward on higher speed rail improvements. I look forward in terms of this bill giving us a marketing advantage to track from Chicago a number of different people who would visit our city. That is a market that we have not entered into much but it is something that we need. It is only five hours away.

The member for Windsor—Tecomseh should be praised for this initiative because he is using his time in the House of Commons to try to make better economic decisions and social justice by tackling the organized crime element. I commend him on that. We need more of that in this place.

• (1850)

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would echo the comments of my colleague who just spoke. I congratulate the hon. House Leader of the Official Opposition for his thoughtful consideration of the matter, a matter that is important to Canadians.

We will be voting in support of this bill at second reading in order to send it to a parliamentary committee for further review and examination and to hear from witnesses.

Gambling in Canada is a properly-regulated activity governed by the Criminal Code that sets out the parameters for gaming. As has been previously stated in debate, up until 1985 the federal government was directly involved in running lotteries. It then devolved that through a provincial-federal agreement and the ensuing revenues went to the provinces. As a result, while the Canadian government maintains its legislative responsibility for criminal law, it is the responsibility of the provinces to licence and regulate all legal forms of gaming so long as the activities remain within the scope of the Criminal Code.

Betting on sports currently falls under paragraph 207(4)(b), which is the paragraph that is proposed to be amended by this private member's bill. It defines "lottery schemes" and explicitly prohibits provinces from allowing wagering on "any race or fight, single sports event or athletic contest".

In reaction to this prohibition, provinces, through their provincial gaming corporations, have long offered parlayed-based wagering on sporting events. This allows for individuals to bet on the outcomes of three or more sporting events. We think of PRO-LINE, which is popular with millions of Canadians and allows them to wager on sports throughout the world, whether it is the National Hockey League, the National Basketball Association or the one that is most popular in my house, the English premier football league.

These types of wagers allow individuals to choose the outcome of three or more sporting events, the odds of which are published in advance by the provincial gaming corporation. In order to win, a person must correctly predict all of the outcomes. For millions of Canadians, this is a fun activity. It allows them to be more involved in the sport they are watching or following.

Regulated gaming provides a legitimate and sanctioned activity free from tampering and has the effect of generating substantial revenues for governments.

Bill C-290 would delete the section from the Criminal Code that currently prohibits betting on a single sport and would allow provinces the ability to create a regulated environment consistent with their current gaming activities. For individuals, the change would allow them to bet on one match as opposed to three or more so long as the odds were predetermined and published.

It has been suggested by my colleague, the House Leader of the Official Opposition, that several provinces have a desire to see this specific change to the Criminal Code. As an example, two of them, Ontario and British Columbia, have taken the additional step of writing the federal justice minister.

Why support this change? There is a lot of illegal gambling in Canada. Some of it relates to betting on single sporting events. Millions of dollars are spent illegally on single sport gambling and much of this activity is conducted by organized crime and bookies. It is underground and it unregulated.

Technology is also playing a role in the new gaming reality. Members will not be surprised to know that the criminal world adapts very quickly to new technology, using the Internet to exploit and make money from illegal gaming. Illegal sports wagering is all too common throughout North America.

Private Members' Business

The full extent of this illegal gambling is unknown, but some reports suggest it is massive. I will cite a couple of them.

The United States National Gambling Impact Study Commission has stated that estimates of the scope of illegal sports betting in the United States range anywhere from \$80 billion to \$380 billion annually. We have heard these figures from the member for Windsor—Tecumseh.

• (1855)

In Canada, a review of the annual reports of the Criminal Intelligence Service Canada suggests that "bookmaking exists in every region of Canada". According to the report, gaming profits revenue to organized crime groups to fund their illegal and legal activities. It says:

While the size of the illegal bookmaking market in Canada is unknown, it is also thought to be significant. If the range of illegal sports betting in the United States is accurate, it would not be unreasonable to assume that the range in Canada is between \$10.0 billion and \$40.0 billion.

These figures underline the seriousness of this issue and the need for action.

Regulated gaming provides a legitimate way for Canadians to gamble and, to be frank, it is a significant source of revenue for governments. Illegal gambling means lost tax revenue that provinces might use to provide more and better service to their citizens.

One sensible measure to combat illegal gambling is to change the Criminal Code to allow the provinces to regulate betting on single sporting events. It would have the effect of legalizing what is a common practice and deprive organized crime of another revenue stream.

While single-game betting is currently illegal in most jurisdictions, it is a booming business in other parts of the world. Online gaming is regulated and legal in many countries and they are reaping the benefit from increased tax revenues and profits. The largest component of this online betting includes sports and horse racing.

I believe this bill helps get the discussion going by pointing to a significant reality in Canada; that is to say there are legal and illegal forms of gaming and we need to address the latter.

I realize, as well, that some Canadians and perhaps members here as well, have, for various reasons, an issue with gambling under any circumstances. For them, there are some reasonable concerns. Like many activities, there are dangers involved in gambling. We all know, or have heard stories, of people who have an addiction to gambling with consequences that are serious and profound. A gambling addiction can overtake one's life. It can result in job loss, a broken family and financial ruin and we need to be sensitive to those concerns. However, for the vast majority of Canadians gambling is a fun and harmless activity.

Private Members' Business

In my home province of Prince Edward Island, for example, one of the highlights of the summer is our famous Gold Cup and Saucer. The Gold Cup and Saucer is one of the premier harness-race events in the world and one that has attracted thousands of tourists over the years. It is a great spectator sport, a great tourist attraction and a source of economic activity that is important to the local economy of Charlottetown. Tom Mullally and his team at the Red Shores Racetrack & Casino have done a wonderful job in preserving and enhancing this great island tradition.

I will be supporting this bill at second reading and hope that all members will do the same. It is important that we might have the opportunity to call witnesses at the committee to better understand the issues related to gaming in Canada. We may also have the chance to hear from people who may have concerns about this legislation and it is important that we hear from all sides of this issue before we proceed. I am sure the mover of the bill would agree with this as well.

• (1900)

Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is an honour for me to speak in favour of private member's Bill C-290, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (sports betting).

At present, the Criminal Code only authorizes a province or territory to conduct betting on the outcome of multiple sporting events. That form of betting is sometimes called "parlay betting". By way of contrast, a province or territory may not currently conduct betting on the outcome of a single game.

Private member's Bill C-290, as sponsored by the hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh, would modernize section 207 of the Criminal Code, which is the "lottery scheme" provision by authorizing a province or a territory to conduct, within its jurisdiction, betting on a single sporting event, such as a single hockey game.

Bill C-290 would leave it to each province or territory to decide whether or not to offer single sporting events betting and if so, whether to operate the betting by telephone, Internet and/or in land-based locations. Such provincial-territorial decision-making is precisely what now exists in section 207 of the Criminal Code with respect to provincial and territorial choices for other forms of lottery schemes, such as VLTs, video lottery terminals, and slot machines.

Under the lottery scheme provisions of the Criminal Code, only a provincial or territorial government may conduct a lottery scheme that is operated on or through a computer, slot machine or video device. A province or territory may not license others to do so.

Some provinces currently place video lottery terminals and slot machines in a land-based location, such as a casino or a race track, or in a lounge or pub. Similarly, under Bill C-290, a province or territory could place a single sport event betting operation in a casino, a race track or any other location that it might deem appropriate.

Currently under section 207 of the Criminal Code, a province or territory may also conduct a "lottery scheme" in co-operation with another province. We know that provinces and territories using this authorization have worked together to offer such national ticket

lottery schemes, such as Lotto 6/49. Similar inter-jurisdictional co-operation would be possible under the amendments proposed in Bill C-290 for single event sports betting. A province or territory could choose to work co-operatively with any other province or territory.

Similarly, it would be up to the provinces or territories to ensure that they consult with the sport organizations to ensure the integrity of the game on which the single sport event betting is being offered. Similarly, it would be up to the provinces and territories to consult with problem gambling service providers to ensure that single sport event bettors gamble responsibly.

I have been talking today about single sport event betting that would be conducted by a province or territory as a lottery scheme under the authority of section 207 of the Criminal Code of Canada. It is worth remembering that section 204 of the Criminal Code already authorizes any bet, so long as it is done between persons who are not in any way engaged in the business of betting. In Canada we are free to spend our money on a bet if we so choose, so long as we are betting with another private individual who is not in any way engaged in the business of betting.

Historically Parliament has not been concerned with betting between private individuals, but rather with illegal bookmakers who entice bettors with credit and who charge exorbitant rates of interest on any debt. Parliament should maintain that concern for illegal bookmaking which has links to organized crime, as the member for Windsor—Tecumseh has correctly pointed out.

If a province or territory chooses to operate a lottery scheme under the amendment proposed in Bill C-290, there would be a benefit to bettors who wish to bet on a single game, but have difficulty finding another person to take the opposite side of the proposed bet. Also, in provinces and territories that choose to operate single sport event betting, bettors who currently bet with illegal bookmakers would have the opportunity to bet with a legal operation conducted by their province or territory. The profits from legal single sport event betting would support provincial programs and services rather than being channeled by illegal bookmakers into organized crime.

Provinces and territories have had many years' experience in conducting a broad range of lottery schemes. It makes sense that the range of lottery schemes that they are authorized to conduct be expanded to include single sport event betting.

• (1905)

Finally, it also makes a lot of sense to keep Canadian gambling dollars within a province or territory rather than sending the money to illegal bookmakers in Canada or elsewhere, or to offshore Internet betting sites that poach Canadian bettors regardless of whether those offshore sites are legal or illegal in the host country. Bill C-290 would be a step in correcting this and a step in the right direction.

For all those reasons, I support Bill C-290 and will be voting in favour of it.

Provinces and territories have the experience to offer this form of betting if that is what their electorate wants. On the other hand, if a province or territory chooses not to go there, that again is the province's decision to make, and it falls within the province's constitutional jurisdiction.

I support this private member's bill. I see it as responding to a growing demand for the modernization of the Criminal Code "lottery scheme" provision. It reflects our circumstances in the 21st century.

For those reasons, I will be supporting the bill. I congratulate the member for Windsor—Tecumseh for bringing this important matter forward.

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate, the hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh has a right of reply.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Madam Speaker, in my original speech I got all my points in. Thank you.

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, last Monday the parliamentary secretary rightly said, "Canadians can be proud of the contributions that Environment Canada scientists make to independent studies and policy development and to protecting Canada's environment", and yes, we all can. Environment Canada has Nobel Prize co-recipients and scientists who make important discoveries, such as Dr. David Tarasick, who co-discovered the Arctic ozone hole.

What she did not say is that over 700 Environment Canada positions are in jeopardy, including those of Nobel Prize co-recipients in the climate change and impacts adaptation group, and that of Dr. Tarasick in ozone research.

What she also did not say is that the government is ending some programs, threatening science and reducing our ability to form evidence-based policy, and we know more cuts are coming.

In Atlantic Canada we have just learned that 18 positions will be lost, with 43 affected. Programs being reduced or lost include studies of the impact of antibiotic use in farmed salmon, the impact of waste from fish hatcheries on local waterways, the biological consequences of acid rain and the impact of mercury on loons. Her claim that the government is strongly committed to protecting Canada's natural heritage simply does not hold up.

Adjournment Proceedings

The parliamentary secretary also said Environment Canada is more than committed to ensuring the continued engagement of stakeholders in international regulatory policy processes. However, scientists are asking the government to develop a plan to ensure the integrity of the ozone monitoring program and to commission a report to assess the adequacy of Canadian contributions to the global observing system for climate in support of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Will the parliamentary secretary commit to fulfilling the request, retracting the letters to ozone staff and continuing to support the ozone program?

Canadians should be highly critical of the Conservatives' record on the environment, particularly regarding climate change. For example, at the UN climate talks, we keep winning Fossil Awards for being followers instead of leaders on the world stage.

Canadians should also be skeptical of the parliamentary secretary's claim that the government will continue to both effectively and efficiently monitor ozone. We know the Ozonesonde program is in jeopardy and that there is no commitment to monitor ozone in the lower atmosphere. Moreover, the World Ozone and Ultraviolet Radiation Data Centre is just one person, and that person has been informed that his or her job is in danger.

Last week the parliamentary secretary brought up the point that Canada banned ozone-depleting chemicals. Yes, this is true, but it was the government back in 1987.

What we need now is for her government to step up to the plate, have the courage of decision-makers 20 years ago and take action to stop the cuts, to protect the scientists and to ensure that world-class science continues.

Let me be very clear. International scientists are calling for cuts to be reversed, and thousands and thousands of people across Canada want the cuts overturned. Will the government now do the right thing and reverse its irresponsible cuts to ozone research so that Canada can honour its international commitments?

• (1910)

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Madam Speaker, my Liberal colleague is hardly in a position to criticize our government's plan as it was the previous Liberal government that signed grand international accords but took little action. In contrast, our government has a tangible plan to address climate change that balances the need to protect our environment and economic growth.

Adjournment Proceedings

With regard to ozone, to repeat what has been said several times in this House, Environment Canada will not close the World Ozone and Ultraviolet Radiation Data Centre. Measuring ozone in the upper atmosphere, otherwise known as stratospheric ozone, is an international obligation required under the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer under the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer.

When it comes to atmospheric ozone science, Canada has been and continues to be a global leader. Since 1966, ozone has been measured from Resolute Bay in Canada. This represents the longest record of ozone observation in the Arctic anywhere in the world. Many of the ozone measurements used globally today were pioneered by Canadians. Changing the way ozone is monitored in Canada does not mean that Canada's ability to monitor ozone would be degraded.

Currently, Environment Canada uses two methods to measure ozone: the Brewer network and the ozonesonde network.

However, just because something is the status quo does not mean it is the best way of doing things. Science and technology improves over time; this is a fact.

The current plan for ozone monitoring is that Environment Canada is to integrate and optimize the two existing ozone networks. This will allow Environment Canada to deliver sound science, while also remaining within budget.

Ozone networking data from Canada are shared with the world via the World Meteorological Organization. In addition, Canada has maintained the World Ozone and Ultraviolet Radiation Data Centre for many years. The WMO supplies the data to other weather centres and agencies in Europe and the U.S.

To be clear, Environment Canada is not closing the World Ozone and Ultraviolet Radiation Data Centre.

Integrating ozone monitoring networks and changing the management of the World Ozone and Ultraviolet Radiation Data Centre will mean reducing the number of employees dedicated to ozone science. However, Environment Canada staff would remain dedicated to both these activities and to achieving quality results.

To reiterate, Environment Canada will continue to measure ozone.

• (1915)

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Madam Speaker, last week the parliamentary secretary asked me to support the government's plan to continue to monitor ozone. It is not a plan; it is cuts.

As a scientist, I simply cannot support cuts that will reduce Canada's ability to monitor the environment and respond to problems, reduce our country's ability to explore the links between ozone and climate change, and threaten international science and Canada's reputation. This is why I brought leading independent atmospheric scientists to Parliament Hill to speak at a non-partisan event to members of Parliament and senators this morning. They spoke about Canada's unique position to lead ozone research, our leadership in this area, and our responsibility to undertake research.

Finally, in light of the science presented today, I implore the government to do the right thing and reverse the cuts.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Madam Speaker, Environment Canada will keep up its monitoring of ozone in the upper atmosphere. Environment Canada will not close the World Ozone and Ultraviolet Radiation Data Centre. Canada will continue to be a world leader in ozone monitoring, as it has been since 1966.

[Translation]

FLOODING IN MONTRÉGIE

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this is an important moment for me today as I rise in this House to speak about a vital issue that affects coastal residents of the Gaspé, the Lower St. Lawrence and Montérégie.

I will give a bit of background. Last December, almost one year ago, high tides pounded the Gaspé and the Lower St. Lawrence, causing all kinds of damage to the shoreline, land and homes. Shortly after that, in the spring, Montérégie was also hit by flooding caused mainly by overflowing rivers. This reminder is important because we have asked the government many times to help the victims in the Gaspé and Montérégie.

The federal government's current response program provides assistance to the provincial government to help disaster victims. The current program is a joint program that we are very familiar with. Over and above the more than \$8 million Quebec will initially have to pay, the federal government will contribute dollar for dollar to provide the province with additional assistance to offset the cost of the damage.

However, it is not this program that we are talking about today, but a new program. All last spring, the government was being pressured to bring back the former shoreline erosion program, which fell under the responsibility of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. There was a program that allowed shoreline communities, whether they were along the St. Lawrence River or other large rivers in our beautiful land, to obtain help in the case of natural disasters or situations requiring them to adapt to the reality of the changing shoreline.

Last spring, we asked the government a number of times to bring back such a program. A new program is now needed with new adaptation measures, outside the existing program, that will allow the federal government to help provinces that experience weather-related damage.

Adjournment Proceedings

On June 6, when he passed through Montérégie, the Prime Minister announced that there would be new mitigation measures to reduce the impact of weather-related shoreline damage.

My questions for the government are very clear. What exactly are these measures? Who exactly will these measures help? What criteria will victims or communities have to meet in order to receive funding from the government to adapt their shorelines? How much will the government invest in this new program or these new measures and, more specifically, when will these new measures come into effect?

Last week, the Government of Quebec hastened to double its efforts to help flood victims receive help more quickly. Now, I believe that it is time that the federal government lived up to flood victims' expectations by confirming and implementing such measures.

• (1920)

[*English*]

Ms. Candice Hooppner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank the House for the opportunity to address the member's question regarding the Prime Minister's commitment to provide financial assistance to provinces and territories for flooding mitigation efforts in 2011, including those in the flood affected regions of Montérégie and Gaspé in Quebec.

The year 2011 has been an exceptional year for flooding across the country. Provinces and territories conducted an assessment of patterns of precipitation, rainfall and snowfall, temperature, snowmelt, and soil moisture conditions which provided indications for significant flooding in 2011. Some provinces made proactive, permanent mitigation investments to eliminate or reduce the impact and risks of hazards through measures taken before 2011 flooding.

To support these long-term investments, the Prime Minister committed the Government of Canada to cost share with the provinces on a 50-50 basis for permanent mitigation measures taken specifically for this year's flooding that are not otherwise eligible under the federal disaster financial assistance arrangements.

Recognizing the increasing impact of flooding on Canadian communities, the Prime Minister also indicated that the Government of Canada is prepared to discuss a mitigation strategy that would apply to all provinces and territories and which would enhance infrastructure to better withstand future floods.

Pursuant to these commitments, officials at Public Safety Canada are working closely with its provincial and territorial counterparts to develop two key programs with a focus on mitigation: a one time contribution program to reimburse affected provinces and territories for permanent flood mitigation measures taken specifically for 2011 flooding and a long-term mitigation strategy.

The Government of Canada recognizes the value and contribution of proactive mitigation measures taken before an emergency or disaster occurs to eliminate or reduce the impacts and risks of hazards in order to protect lives, property, the environment, and reduce economic disruption. Not only does mitigation serve to reduce the impact of disasters on the lives of Canadians but it is also a cost effective approach for reducing the economic burden of

disaster response and recovery costs on all orders of government, businesses, communities, families and individuals.

Though issues related to flood management are primarily within the purview of the provinces and territories, the Government of Canada is committed to providing assistance to flood affected regions following natural disasters through federal mechanisms, including the disaster financial assistance arrangements, and other forms of aid. For example, earlier this year following a request for assistance from the province of Quebec for significant flooding in the Montérégie region, the federal government responded quickly by deploying the Canadian armed forces to provide assistance to the affected communities.

One of the highest priorities for the government is the safety and security of its citizens. We will continue to work with our federal, provincial and territorial partners, including the province of Quebec, to protect Canadians from a range of natural disasters and to make our communities more resilient.

• (1925)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-François Fortin: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the parliamentary secretary for her answer.

I believe the government is willing to work with the provinces that have been affected by these disasters, both through the existing program, which allows the federal government to help and compensate for damage sustained by the provinces, and also through new adaptation measures that would allow communities to adapt to changing weather conditions. In light of such evidence, we can no longer deny climate change around the world, but in Quebec and Canada in particular.

In light of the government's openness to establishing new adaptation measures, what is this government's game plan to raise awareness of these measures much more quickly, given how urgent it is for communities to adapt to the new realities?

[*English*]

Ms. Candice Hooppner: Madam Speaker, let me assure my colleague that the Government of Canada remains committed to working as quickly as possible with the provinces and territories, and other partners to ensure a safe and resilient Canada, and specifically in regard to flooding. My own riding in Manitoba has experienced severe flooding. We are working very closely and as quickly as we can.

It is important to note that during the flood season, Canada's armed forces were actively engaged in the regions severely affected by flooding and assisted in evacuations as well as preserving infrastructure, transportation routes and residential areas. That happened both in Quebec and Manitoba.

The government is working to provide financial assistance to affected provinces through the disaster financial assistance arrangements, which is the mechanism through which the government provides financial assistance to provincial and territorial governments for response and recovery from natural disasters.

Adjournment Proceedings

As I mentioned previously, the government will share on a 50-50 basis the cost of any permanent flood mitigation measures taken for this year's flooding that are not eligible under the disaster financial assistance arrangements.

Our government—

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: I regret to interrupt the hon. member.

The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:27 p.m.)

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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, November 2, 2011



Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, November 2, 2011

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

• (1405)

[English]

The Speaker: It being Wednesday, we will now have the singing of the national anthem led by the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

[Members sang the national anthem]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

TIBET

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, as a member of Parliament, I rise with pride today and with solemnity on the occasion of marking a vigil that is taking place outside these doors. Canadian Tibetans are in vigil in solidarity with so many Tibetans who are experiencing oppression due to the Chinese government policies toward Tibet.

The desperation of these people has now led to self-immolation acts, an act of desperation for anyone who understands Buddhist religion and culture. This is the sign that things have become a crisis for those in Tibet. In the words of his holiness, the Dalai Lama, “We must find a peaceful way forward”.

The European parliament, just days ago, on October 27, passed a resolution calling on China to act. I would urge all hon. members to join with the European Union and help protect religious rights in Tibet.

RANDOM ACT OF KINDNESS DAY

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, eight years ago, Freedom House, a church and ministry centre in Brantford, began a mission called “The Kindness Project” to see if a city could be transformed by good into good by using simple but strategic acts of kindness.

In these eight years, among other things, roughly 20,000 hamburgers have been given away; a free winter carnival, Frosty

Fest, is hosted; a school curriculum is in the works; affordable housing has been provided for those in need; and a local superhero, Captain Kindness, has emerged and taken control of the city. This Friday, November 4, will be the second annual Random Act of Kindness Day in Brantford.

The Kindness Project seeks to uncover the untapped level of synergy in the community as a collective commitment to serving each other. It is people helping people with what we all have in our hands to give.

We hope, together, to make Brantford known as the kindest city in Canada.

TIBET

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today, Tibetans and supporters from around the world are gathering to take part in a global day of action. From Zurich, to San Diego, to Vancouver, to right outside our doors, people are coming together to seek justice for the people of Tibet.

Ten young Tibetans have set themselves on fire in eastern Tibet since March 2011, in fact, eight since September. These unprecedented and truly desperate acts are a cry to the outside world for help. China has intensified its violent crackdown in Ngaba and across Tibet. Tibetan monasteries continue to be sacked and monks continue to be sentenced without fair trial.

It is time for the government to act. It is time for the Government of Canada to take a lead in coordinating an international response to condemn the Chinese government's repressive measures against the Tibetans. Canada should also work to ensure that the United Nations immediately sends a fact-finding team to Ngaba to assess the situation.

We cannot afford to waste another day.

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Iran continues to support terrorism, defiantly pursues nuclear weapons, calls for the end of the state of Israel and systematically tramples the rights of innocent Iranians.

Statements by Members

The former head of Iran's state owned bank, Mahmoud Reza Khavari, is reported to be living in Toronto. According to media, he was able to obtain Canadian citizenship in 2005. A second man connected to Iran's state owned bank has also reportedly taken refuge in Canada. Mehregan Amirhosravi is in Montreal.

Their presence in Canada is a cause for concern because Canada, our allies and the United Nations have all stated that Bank Melli is tied to funding Iran's nuclear program, as well as terrorist groups throughout the Middle East. Bank Melli has funneled money to Hamas, Hezbollah and Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

These men must not be allowed to brazenly defy and abuse our generous immigration system and action must be taken.

I implore the government to pursue all legal grounds to revoke Khavari's reported citizenship and investigate their involvement in crimes against humanity, funding nuclear weapons, supporting terrorism and committing fraud.

TIBET

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 10 young Tibetans have set themselves ablaze, a set of unprecedented and desperate actions, to protest the Chinese repression of Tibetan rights and assaults on the monks and nuns of Tibetan monasteries.

Accordingly, we call on the Chinese authorities to release those imprisoned simply because they exercised their right to freedom of religion and expression, to cease and desist from their assaults on the Tibetan people, and to enter into dialogue with the Tibetan leadership.

We call on the Canadian government, in concert with world leaders, on this global day of action, to stand in solidarity with the Tibetan people, to condemn the repression by Chinese authorities and to nurture dialogue with the Tibetan leadership with a view to protecting the human security of the Tibetan people.

OPERATION HERO

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a group of local Barrie business and community leaders launched Operation Hero last year. Operation Hero is a scholarship campaign to help fund students of military families to attend Georgian College.

Fundraising commenced in April 2010, with a goal of reaching \$1 million. Those who have already generously donated \$1,000 or more have been receiving framed commemorative flags that are now scattered across the riding in homes, schools, offices and businesses.

On October 23, CFB Borden held a 5k, 10k and half marathon in support of this great cause. I was very proud to participate with 1,000 other runners. I am happy to report that donations to Operation Hero have now surpassed an astonishing \$700,000.

Operation Hero's scholarships are helping so many young people better realize their full potential through post-secondary education.

I would like to send special thanks to the key organizers: honorary colonel for CFB Borden, Jamie Massie; base commander, Colonel Louis Meloche; and Georgian College president, Brian Tambllyn.

For more information, I ask everyone to visit operationhero.ca.

• (1410)

HOMELESSNESS

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today, I congratulate the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness and the many volunteers from my riding who made Homelessness Action Week a resounding success.

Victorians came together to share information, provide services to our homeless population and distribute more than 600 survival packs of hats and gloves to the homeless.

I participated in Project Connect and listened to stories from Victorians experiencing homelessness and poverty. Many are unemployed because of the recession or living in poverty because they have disabilities. An increasing number of Victoria seniors are resorting to food banks.

Homelessness is a particularly disturbing aspect of poverty because it could so easily be eliminated. I urge the House to come together to make homelessness a thing of the past. We can, if we want to, make Canada a better place for all.

TIBET

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today, Tibetans and supporters have gathered outside this very building in a desperate cry to stop the crackdown of religious freedom in their region.

Canada has expressed its serious concerns about the human rights situation in China, including continuing restrictions on the freedoms of expression, association, religion and belief of ethnic Tibetans. We remain concerned about the arbitrary detention and treatment of political prisoners in Tibet and have raised the issue of Tibetans and other religious minorities in China in bilateral meetings and on the international stage, including at the United Nations General Assembly.

Our government takes the issue of religious freedom in China and around the world very seriously. The freedoms of religious belief and practice are at the heart of our principled foreign policy.

We do not hesitate to raise such issues as part of mutually respectful, mature dialogue between our two countries and encourage substantive dialogue between Chinese leaders and religious minorities.

WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY

Mr. Peter Braid (Kitchener—Waterloo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last weekend, Wilfrid Laurier University in my riding celebrated its 100th anniversary.

For the last century, WLU has provided education excellence and developed and inspired the leaders who have shaped our country and made a positive difference in the world.

From its official opening in 1911 as the Evangelical Lutheran Seminary of Canada to the present day, Wilfrid Laurier has grown, evolved and continues to reach new heights. Today, it is one of Canada's top universities, with over 15,000 students leading undergraduate and graduate programs and expanding international initiatives.

This anniversary commemorates the historic achievements of this university and inspires a new vision of progress and optimism for the future.

I ask members to join me in congratulating Wilfrid Laurier University on this significant milestone and wishing it all the best in the coming century.

INDIA

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is with great sorrow that I extend my sympathies on the 27th anniversary of the tragic events of 1984 that targeted Sikh men, women and children.

The New Democratic Party of Canada stands in solidarity with the Sikh community, demands justice for the survivors and an explanation for why and how this community was targeted by organized mobs.

The victims and survivors of 1984 cannot sit idly by waiting for the government to recognize their plight and frustration.

Rehabilitation support for the broken families, especially the trauma the widows and children experienced, must be prioritized. The negligence of the police must be examined. The truth and those guilty must be brought to justice. These are not demands. These are the obligations of a democratic government to its citizens.

Remembrance is the tie that binds us to our past as it guides us for the challenges of the future.

Lest we forget.

REMEMBRANCE DAY

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, from Vimy Ridge to Juno Beach, Kap Yong to Kandahar, Canada has always punched above its weight. At home and abroad, our men and women in uniform have always represented and defended Canadian values.

Brave soldiers, like one of my constituents, Mr. Edward Carter-Edwards, who is on the Hill today, was a prisoner of war in the Second World War.

Statements by Members

The courage, honour and valour shown by the Canadian military throughout our country's history is overwhelming. Canada has consistently stood by its friends in their time of need and our military personnel have proudly led the way. In doing so, many have paid the ultimate sacrifice.

I encourage all my colleagues to take a moment to reflect on the sacrifices made by these heroes.

In the words of Laurence Binyon from his famous poem, "*For the Fallen*":

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.

• (1415)

[Translation]

LOUISE GRATTON

Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to highlight the exceptional work of a biologist who works for an organization in my riding called Appalachian Corridor, whose mission is to protect natural areas. Louise Gratton was the recipient of the Pierre Dansereau award, presented on Thursday by the Association des biologistes du Québec. This award, which was created in 2001, is handed out every year by this organization in recognition of the exceptional contribution of a biologist through research, teaching or communication on biological diversity.

Over the years, Ms. Gratton has acquired a significant amount of expertise in protecting and conserving natural areas, botany and environmental management. In addition, her commitment as volunteer has been outstanding. The Pierre Dansereau award just is one of many awards that she has received. I congratulate this scientist for working to protect Quebec's natural heritage.

[English]

INUIT TAPIRIIT KANATAMI

Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I want to recognize a special event that will be taking place at the National Arts Centre.

The Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, or ITK, will be hosting a gala event on November 3 to celebrate its efforts over the past four decades to advance Inuit issues as a national representative organization.

To help commemorate this important milestone, the National Film Board, in collaboration with Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, is launching a one of a kind collection of Inuit films.

This collection will give Inuit a lasting record of their vibrant culture and provide all Canadians the opportunity to appreciate how Inuit continue to shape and enrich our country.

ITK is a valued partner of the Government of Canada in our efforts to build a prosperous north and improve the well-being of aboriginal peoples.

Statements by Members

I encourage all members of the House to attend the gala on November 3.

TAKE OUR KIDS TO WORK

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every year on the first Wednesday of November, thousands of grade 9 students participate in the Take Our Kids to Work program. Now in its 17th year, this program sees over 200,000 students take part in a day-long job-shadowing experience at approximately 75,000 businesses and organizations in Canada.

As part of this year's event, the Learning Partnership, with the support of the Scotiabank Group, held the Ultimate Dream Job contest. The national online photo contest ran six weeks and was chosen by public voting.

I am pleased to announce that Jacob Halloran, a grade 9 student from Guysborough in my riding, has been selected this year's winner.

Jacob will meet today with His Excellency the Right Hon. David Johnston and our very own distinguished Speaker of the House.

More than 40,000 people nationally and internationally participated in this year's contest. Jacob's dream is to become a musician. Jacob's sincerity, creativity, determination and inspiration obviously made an impression.

Take Our Kids to Work is the Learning Partnership's signature program. It connects young people with work. The goal is to give as many young Canadians as possible the opportunity to explore career options and interests.

I would like to commend the Learning Partnership and Scotiabank Group for their continued support—

The Speaker: Order. I am afraid the hon. member has run out of time.

The hon. member for Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe.

[Translation]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Robert Goguen (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP's interim leader made a mistake last week when she was talking about jobs and the economy. She was speaking to her friends from the days when she was a union leader. She quoted inaccurate statistics and incorrectly stated that the unemployment rate is on the rise.

Our Conservative government is focusing on what concerns Canadians: job creation and economic growth. Canada has created more than 650,000 jobs since July 2009, the strongest growth in the G7. But Canada is not immune to the economic turmoil and turbulence the world is experiencing, particularly in Europe and the United States. As a result, the Conservative government is working hard to implement the next phase of Canada's economic action plan.

The last thing Canadian families want is another tax increase that would lead to job losses and hurt the economy. This is yet another example that illustrates why the NDP—

• (1420)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Jeanne-Le Ber.

[English]

CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP): Mr. Speaker, from *Mr. Dressup* to *The Friendly Giant*, *Bobino* and *Monsieur Surprise*, *The Beachcombers*, *King of Kensington*, *La Famille Plouffe*, and *Séraphin*, these are just a few of the images and characters that have contributed to our identity as Canadians.

For 75 years the CBC has reflected and shared who we are as Canadians from coast to coast to coast and around the world. We heard the news from Knowlton Nash and Bernard Derome, and the world heard us through Lorne Greene and Marcel Ouimet.

For 75 years, CBC Radio plays have brought our unique storytellers to the world.

[Translation]

CBC has greatly contributed to shaping our identity as Canadians and Quebecers. In Quebec, Radio-Canada has represented the culture and people, thus helping to make Quebec the strong and vibrant nation that it is today.

[English]

For 75 years, CBC has given us the best in good times and in bad.

Today I stand to salute the men and women past and present who have helped represent Canadians at home and abroad.

Happy birthday to CBC.

[Translation]

Happy birthday, CBC.

[English]

NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the disunited NDP is showing Canadians again and again that it does not have a plan when it comes to key issues.

Other than hiking taxes on millions of Canadians, which is the one issue NDP members from their placeholder leader to their president Brian Topp stand united behind, the NDP is divided on important questions.

The NDP is disunited when it comes to fairness in the shipbuilding process, the merit-based selection of Supreme Court justices, and marketing freedom for western Canadian farmers. A senior leadership candidate is calling for a proposed merger with the Liberals. The list goes on. The placeholder NDP leader even makes up statistics with regard to employment numbers.

These are yet more worrying examples that the disunited NDP is not fit to govern.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

JUSTICE

Mrs. Nicole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is what the Quebec justice minister had to say about the Conservatives' approach to justice: "The solutions proposed by Bill C-10 do not meet the stated objective of public safety, nor do they address the actual needs of punishing offenders and preventing crime and recidivism." The Government of Quebec has said that it will not pay for the Conservatives' regressive strategy.

Are the Conservatives going to make Quebec pay against its will?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, what most of the people in Quebec and the rest of Canada want is a more effective justice system. They want us to crack down on dangerous criminals, ensure that the streets are safe and enhance security. Let us stop always debating and wanting to pit rehabilitation against deterrence. They go hand in hand. They are not mutually exclusive.

Now, we have to fulfill our mandate of making our streets safer and we intend to do so through Bill C-10.

[English]

Mrs. Nicole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is not only Quebec that is unhappy, but Ontario is unhappy as well with the Conservatives' plan to download the costs of its wrong on crime agenda to the provinces.

To quote Premier McGuinty:

[If, for example, you want us to build new prisons in Ontario and staff those prisons with highly trained personnel, that's an additional cost to us and it is incumbent upon you, as the creator of those costs, to come up with the money.

Will the Conservatives come up with the money, or just download the costs of its prisons agenda onto the provinces?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians gave our government a strong mandate to keep our streets and communities safe. The opposition parties are demanding tougher laws for law-abiding farmers and duck hunters while opposing tougher penalties for violent criminals and rapists who prey on children.

I hope that in her third question she will quote a third government, the Manitoba NDP government, which supports Bill C-10.

• (1425)

Mrs. Nicole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, another province, British Columbia, is also unhappy and has raised concerns.

With the Conservatives playing hide and seek on the costs, provinces like British Columbia do not even know how big the final bill will be.

British Columbia's solicitor general, Shirley Bond, said:

Oral Questions

Any time you impose minimum sentences there are going to be downstream impacts for us just in terms of capacity and cost....

How much will British Columbia have to pay to implement the Conservatives' prisons agenda?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have a responsibility here. We have a clear mandate, and the majority of Canadians are seeking tougher penalties for violent criminals and rapists who prey on children.

This is what we are doing. We are making laws more severe to ensure safety in our streets. To be more severe is not the opposite of rehabilitation; it is complementary. We should get out of these ideological debates.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the message from the provinces to the government is clear. They are worried about being saddled with the costs of the Conservatives' wrong-headed prisons agenda that will not reduce crime.

This out-of-touch government wants the provinces to foot the bill for more jails, more staff and more congestion in the courts.

Where does the government expect the provinces to get the money, from health care and education? How many front-line police officers will be taken off the streets to pay for the Conservatives' megaprisons?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is very clear there are benefits to actually putting rapists and dangerous criminals behind bars. It means that ordinary Canadians are protected.

I know that the opposition NDP would like to target duck hunters, sport shooters and farmers in my riding, but that will not bring the crime rate down. Targeting real criminals will.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, past transfers to the provinces will not help pay the billions in bills from the government's misguided prisons agenda.

Experts have testified at committee that this bill will not actually improve public safety. The Canadian Bar Association's criminal justice section, made up of prosecutors and defence counsel, called the bill counterproductive. Yet, the government is bullying provinces into writing a blank cheque with taxpayers' money.

Will the government listen to the provinces and abandon its out of touch prisons agenda? When will it start helping provinces and communities invest in crime prevention and more front-line police officers?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would suggest to the member that he perhaps go to downtown Winnipeg and speak to members of his party, the NDP party, that holds government there, that supports Bill C-10, and wants to actually see dangerous offenders in prison.

It is willing to pay the cost and, furthermore, it does not want the long gun registry. It knows it is a waste of resources. It knows it detracts police from actually hunting down real criminals.

Oral Questions

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the government on the question that I think still preoccupies most Canadians, which is the economy.

We on this side of the House are finding it hard to understand why the government is still pursuing an ideological path when it actually has an opportunity to do something about two very direct issues which we have raised before. The first one is the increase in employment insurance premiums, which makes zero economic sense at the present time. The second is the failure to ensure that tax benefits and credits go to those Canadians who need it most.

Why is the government having such a hard time addressing these two questions?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the path that we are taking is working and we are following that path. Canada has created over 650,000 jobs and the Liberals voted against it. We allowed income splitting for older people and they voted against it.

We created measures to ensure the fees for EI premiums would not increase and the Liberals voted against it. Now they are opposing the tax credit for hiring SMEs and, once again, they will vote against it.

• (1430)

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is a \$1.2 billion employment insurance premium increase at a time when the world economy is hitting a very heavy storm, and when Canadians and small businesses need help. I am asking the government to take off the ideological blinkers. Let the government see what needs to be done and let the government respond to what is a clear and compelling need of small business, workers and the people of Canada. That is what it is not responding to.

[Translation]

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about payroll taxes. Each time we have taken action to protect jobs, the Liberals have voted against it. Recently, we took steps to scale back the recommended increase in EI premiums and, once again, the Liberals are against them. They are making a fuss today, but when it comes time to vote and actually take real action that will affect all Canadian taxpayers, they are not shy about voting against such action. That is precisely what is so offensive and shameful.

AUDITOR GENERAL

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, clearly, the process for appointing an Auditor General is seriously flawed. The government cannot announce in a job posting that a position requires proficiency in both official languages and then appoint someone who is not qualified based on the government's own requirements. This is an affront to the principles of natural justice.

Will the government agree to postpone the vote, until all the parties can come to an agreement on the appointment of the next Auditor General?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Ferguson was chosen

on the basis of merit for his capabilities. He is very capable. He must speak French. He said he would learn to speak French. He is taking French lessons and he will speak French. Here is what Sheila Fraser said:

He will be a very good auditor general. He is very capable, a very nice person and I think once parliamentarians get to know him, they will appreciate him.

Learning a second language is not easy, but others have done it before him. It is possible. I think Mike is a very intelligent person. He knows it is important for him to become bilingual.

The matter is therefore closed.

JUSTICE

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government's crime legislation is misguided. It will cost taxpayers billions of dollars, but the government does not seem too concerned about that because it is sending the bill to the provinces. Quebec has no intention of absorbing this undisclosed expense and it is not the only province refusing to do so. This government is not even considering the provinces.

When will the government realize that its plan completely misses the mark?

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has not taken into consideration the thoughts of the voters of this country who gave us a mandate to crack down on crime. That being said, I understand the NDP position. Any money being spent to crack down on people in the long gun registry is okay, but its members draw the line when it goes after drug traffickers and child pornographers.

Canadians gave us a mandate to go after criminals in this country and that is exactly what we are going to do.

[Translation]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the provinces are right to refuse to cut their social services in order to fund megaprisons, especially when Canadians do not even know how much such a program will cost. The NDP has been saying from the beginning that this program will cost Canadians an absolute fortune without any certainty that it will have a real impact on reducing the crime rate.

Will this government go back to the drawing board and consult the provinces to ensure that they are not penalized by such a misguided program?

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have had extensive consultation with the provinces. They are all very aware of the pieces of legislation that we have put together. The administration of justice is, of course, the responsibility of the provinces.

That being said, I was very pleased when I saw in the last budget that there was an increase for the transfer to the provinces of \$2.4 billion to allow them to fulfill their constitutional responsibilities. All of us should support that and take some comfort in that.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, B.C. has now joined the list of provinces upset about paying for the Conservatives' prison agenda. Provinces want to invest in front line police officers so we can have safer communities. However, the government is shortchanging the provinces. We know who will pay for it, B.C. families.

Why will the government not let provinces like B.C. have a say in how they are going to spend their own money? When will the Conservatives finally reveal the full cost of their out of touch prison agenda?

• (1435)

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me get this straight. We should spend more money on police officers so that they can catch bad guys, but we should not put them in prison. That is the fundamental flaw with the NDP philosophy. The members believe in talking tough as long as we do not do anything.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is just so typical of that minister and that government. They do not understand—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh has the floor.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, they have no concept of what front line police officers do in terms of preventing crime.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. As I said earlier this week, if members cannot come to order, they might find themselves short of questions. Order, please.

The hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are about to stick the provinces with a billion-plus dollars in bills for their prison agenda. Ontario has said enough and it is demanding that the Conservatives pay for their own prison agenda, not the provinces. They want front line police officers, not more prisons, just front line police officers. That is where the money should be spent.

The Conservatives do not understand. I do not understand the humour that is coming from that side of the House.

However, if they are so hell-bent on ramming through this bill, will they at least listen to the three provinces that have come forward and said, "We're not paying the shot". Ontario, Quebec and British

Columbia are not paying the shot. The government should pay the shot.

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do respect my colleague opposite, but I know that he comes from a long and distinguished career of defending criminals, as a defence criminal lawyer. Our perception is a little bit different.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. I know it is a Wednesday. We are barely a third of the way through the list. The hon. Minister of Public Safety has the floor and has a right to respond to the question.

The hon. Minister of Public Safety.

Hon. Vic Toews: Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, I understand the perspective that the member has, given his choice in career, and it is an honourable profession.

It is not the position, though, that our government takes. Our government takes a balanced approach. We want to ensure that victims are protected, that prisoners are—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Western Arctic.

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Privacy Commissioner repudiated Conservative claims about gun registry data. She confirmed records could be shared with the provinces. Once again out of touch Conservative talking points failed to hold up under scrutiny. The Privacy Commissioner says all it takes is an agreement between the government and the provinces.

Will the government agree to drop the ideology and negotiate with those provinces that want to use the records to protect their citizens?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last night, this House historically passed at second reading the ending the long gun registry act by a vote of 156 to 123.

Despite the fact that that member told his constituents that he would vote to end the gun registry, once and for all, he failed his constituents. This government does not fail the people we made that promise to.

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): But, Mr. Speaker, the government is failing all the victims that we are hearing on Bill C-10 and not Bill C-19.

• (1440)

[Translation]

The government's arguments do not hold water. The hon. member for Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River said yesterday that if Quebec wants the registry, then it will have to pay for it. However, the Privacy Commissioner refutes that argument. There need only be an agreement to share the information. There is no breach of privacy and there are no costs to cover. The only obstacle is the Conservatives.

Will the government work in good faith with the provinces—

Oral Questions

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Minister of Public Safety.

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with respect to Bill C-10, which my colleague mentioned, I would like to point out that one of the staunchest supporters of Bill C-10, and the effectiveness of that type of legislation, has been the NDP government in Manitoba, which has made it clear that it will stand with us against criminals, despite the position of the federal NDP.

* * *

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, instead of a serious tendering process, we are stuck with a growing list of problems with the F-35s. The cost of the program has more than doubled, the F-35s have been defeated in combat simulations, communications equipment does not work and, worst of all, the pilots are not even safe. It is all very well for the government to say that it takes the safety of our troops seriously, but this fiasco shows the opposite.

When will the Minister of National Defence finally admit that he has failed? When will he finally review the F-35 program?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all the information provided by the member is false, absolutely false.

[English]

What I continually cannot understand about the NDP is why it opposes getting the best equipment for our military, why it opposes the incredible benefits these purchases would bring to the entire country, including Quebec. I am completely baffled by the position taken by the NDP, which runs contrary to the wishes of the military and the aerospace industry.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, every day new problems with the F-35s come to light. Today, we have learned from an internal National Defence report that the F-35s are so expensive that we cannot afford enough aircraft to meet our needs. Consequently, there will be no room to manoeuvre in the event of the loss of any of the aircraft. This is in addition to concerns about their astronomical cost and safety.

When will the government stop denying the truth? When will the government finally announce an open and transparent bidding process?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again that is absolutely false.

[English]

The Royal Canadian Air Force has clearly stated the number of aircraft it needs, which meets the right balance for its capabilities, as well as the balance in terms of the budget.

We have seen time and time again that every time we have brought forward improvements for military personnel, whether it be improvements for the children of deceased veterans, whether it be improvements for their salaries, for their equipment, whether it is

anything from the graveyard to the schoolyard, the NDP opposes if it would improve things for the Canadian Forces.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, to date we have been urging the Minister of National Defence to put his plan for new fighter jets out to tender, but with the air force calling for 80 planes, not 65, what becomes clear is that the government has no clear sense of its own requirements. It has no plan.

Why 65 planes? Why a plane that does not work in the north? Why a stealth bomber designed to support ground troops? Why blow billions on the F-35?

When will the minister finally admit he has botched this file and hit the eject button on the F-35 program?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the short answer is that is the number the air force asked for. It has clearly indicated that is the right balance. It has clearly indicated that this will allow our pilots in the air force to carry out the important work that we ask of them.

Why is the NDP against giving the best equipment to the best pilots to the best air force, that would improve our aerospace, that would bring jobs and prosperity to our economy in his province and across the country? The NDP's position on this is backward thinking.

* * *

[Translation]

CHAMPLAIN BRIDGE

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the *Blueet*, the minister from the Lac St. Jean region, known for its blueberries.

Today, the papers are reporting that officials have known since December 15 that the Champlain Bridge was a safety hazard and that it could collapse. We could have expected officials at Transport Canada to get together as early as January 6 to find a solution. Instead, the government tried to cover its behind and have the blues pages handy to respond in case of a leak.

What did this government hide? When will it tell the truth about the safety of the Champlain Bridge? We want to know.

• (1445)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have invested in maintaining this bridge in several budgets. Our government was happy to make an announcement recently, through the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, that we would replace the Champlain Bridge and build a new bridge over the St. Lawrence River. These are important advances.

I hope that we will have the support of the hon. member for these projects.

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I asked for a blueberry and got a lemon. I wanted to know what was going on.

The problem is that a decision could have been made on January 6. But we had to wait until October to find out what was going on. Even people at Delcan are saying that it makes no sense and that the bridge could collapse. We have waited all this time and we do not know if the bridge will last another 10 years.

Instead of having to one day appear before a commission of inquiry into the collapse of the Champlain Bridge, could the government table the inspection reports? People are crossing that bridge. Instead of hearing what the minister will say, we want to know whether the bridge is safe.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our minister has demonstrated true leadership on this issue. We have made investments to maintain this bridge. The minister has announced a plan to replace the bridge. The Liberals never did that.

We should focus on infrastructure and not on a Montreal member's campaign for mayor.

* * *

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, international scientists have asked that the cuts to ozone research be reversed. Thousands of Canadians have signed petitions. We have hosted a non-partisan breakfast on Parliament Hill on ozone research that has showed how important ozone research is, and Canada's leadership.

Will the government unequivocally commit today that there will be absolutely no cuts to ozone research in Canada?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have assured the House any number of times in recent weeks, Environment Canada will continue to monitor the ozone. The World Ozone and Ultraviolet Data Centre will continue to deliver world-class services.

This government makes no apologies whatsoever for trying to find the most cost effective ways of protecting the Canadian environment.

* * *

AUDITOR GENERAL

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, experience with analyzing and assessing program spending to ensure real results are being delivered for Canadians, experience with risk methodology consistent with the Treasury Board Secretariat's integrated management framework.

[Translation]

Those are some of the qualifications that were on the French-language job poster put out by the headhunting firm hired by the Conservatives to find a candidate for the position of Auditor General.

My question is simple: how much were these headhunters paid?

Oral Questions

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have already said that the government looked for qualified candidates who were more or less bilingual. Upon completion of a rigorous process, the most qualified candidate was chosen. Again yesterday, Mr. Ferguson said that he wants to and will learn French. However, he has other skills that are important for this position.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what I find interesting about this job posting is that the profile highlights do not mention proficiency in both official languages. There is nothing about that. Nada. Zip. Zero. Moreover, the Conservatives cannot tell us how much they paid the headhunters to put a unilingual job posting on their website.

Why did the Conservatives not feel it necessary to find an Auditor General who is proficient in both languages, as defined by the government's criteria?

• (1450)

[English]

And the job posting was in English only.

[Translation]

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Ferguson is the most qualified candidate. He has said that he wants to and will learn French.

[English]

He is supported by the former auditor general, Madam Fraser. He is supported by those who have worked most closely with him. The Premier of New Brunswick and even the interim Liberal leader of New Brunswick have supported his candidacy because he is the most qualified for the position.

* * *

G20 SUMMIT

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians saw for the first time today disturbing images from inside the notorious G20 detention centre. These makeshift cages held almost 900 people in crowded conditions with very little food, water or even a door on the toilet.

This was the largest mass arrest in Canadian history and the majority of these people were never charged. A year and a half later Canadians are still waiting for answers and waiting for the government to accept responsibility.

When will it conduct an inquiry into the G20 summit?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the member has specific knowledge of some wrongdoing by police officers in the course of executing their duty, it is his obligation to provide that to the provincial authorities that were in charge of that facility during that time.

Oral Questions

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, these are the kind of answers of which Canadians are getting tired. Toronto was turned upside down by this summit. While the Muskoka minister can find millions for his riding, small businesses in my community are still waiting for their compensation.

When will the government properly compensate Toronto businesses and finally provide answers, not just to Toronto but to the entire country about the G20 calamity?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the losses and damages done to Toronto businesses are deeply regrettable. The claims process has been an independent process that has been in place since the previous government put it in place in 2001. It has been used successfully in previous summits.

In the spring I committed to having my office undertake a complete review of the claims process. Following that review, I can assure the member opposite that Toronto businesses were treated just as fairly as every other previous summit.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is squarely focused on what matters to Canadians: jobs and economic growth. I remind the NDP that in these challenging times there is simply no better job creator than free and open trade. That is why we are negotiating a free trade agreement with India that could help our economy grow by \$6 billion a year and increase our two-way trade by almost 50%.

Could the parliamentary secretary tell the House what our government is doing to further advance the job creating pro-trade plan?

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Fleetwood—Port Kells for her strong support for our job-creating free trade plan.

Today, as many members in the House know, already the Minister of International Trade is beginning a week-long trade mission to India. With 1.2 billion consumers in India, India represents tremendous opportunities for Canadian workers and businesses of all sizes.

Deepening Canada's trading relationship with India will help protect and strengthen the financial security of hard-working Canadians, and it is all part of our pro trade free trade plan.

POVERTY

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the growing gap between the rich and the rest of us is brought home when we see the number of Canadians now relying on food banks. However, the government's insulting response was "tough luck, get a job".

Thirty-eight per cent of food bank users are children. Food Banks Canada is saying that investments in child care can help. When will the government invest in a high-quality, affordable child care

program, or is its answer to our nation's hungry children that they should also just get a job?

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that people are going to food banks, but the statistics speak for themselves. The percentage of children living in low-income families has declined significantly from a peak of 18.4% under the Liberal government in 1996 to 9.5% in 2009 under this government. The poverty rate among children of single mothers fell to an all-time low of 21.5% under this government and—

• (1455)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us use the statistic that 38% of food bank users are children. There is a statistic.

If the parliamentary secretary would put aside her talking points, she would see the economy has lost thousands of good full-time jobs. The cost of living is skyrocketing and Canadians are having a harder time making ends meet. That is why so many are turning to the food banks. Eight hundred and fifty thousand people are using food banks in Canada and that is unacceptable.

Will the parliamentary secretary tell us what her government is doing right now to address this crisis?

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, every action we have taken to help Canadian families has allowed them to become more independent and helped them contribute to the economy and to their communities.

We will continue to make investments to make a positive difference in the lives of Canadian families. We have enhanced the national child benefit and the child tax credit. We brought the universal child care benefit into effect, which has brought over 24,000 families and over 55,000 children over the poverty line.

What has the NDP done?

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, national food banks yesterday reported that over 46% in Alberta and 63% in Saskatchewan of rural users are aboriginal. Ten per cent of all food bank users are first nations, Métis or Inuit. That represents a lot of aboriginal women and children. Many rural communities do not even have a food bank to turn to. To their credit, the Samson First Nation women have started a soup kitchen to fill the stomachs of those in need in their community.

What happened to the government's commitment to end discrimination against Canada's aboriginal peoples and to ensure they also benefited from our economy?

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are working with first nations like the Samson Cree Nation. What is important is that we provide the proper incentives to get people supporting good government, that there is economic development so they can look forward to jobs and prosperity and that we do the right things in terms of K to 12 education. Those are all things we are working on in a joint action plan with the national chiefs, and we have made much progress.

[Translation]

POVERTY

Ms. Isabelle Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, food banks are an important service provided for our communities.

In my riding of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, a church was vandalized this week and the thieves even robbed the food bank. Unfortunately, too many families with young children depend on that food bank. This is devastating for them and completely unacceptable.

When will the government really do something to tackle poverty among young people, so that families will not be so vulnerable?

[English]

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the best way to fight poverty in Canada is to get Canadians working.

The economic action plan is doing just that, growing the economy by 650,000 net new jobs since July 2009.

Whether it be the working income tax benefit that has helped low-income Canadians over the welfare wall or the unprecedented investments in training, this government has a plan. Why is the NDP member not voting for it?

JUSTICE

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to come back to Bill C-10.

Canada's crime rate keeps going down. It is a fact. Why does the government want to impose on Canadians the dumb-on-crime big jail agenda that has failed in the U.S.?

It will have a huge cost and it shows a total disregard for our overtaxed justice system. Quebec, Ontario and British Columbia refuse to pay for this nonsense.

Will the government listen to them and replace Bill C-10 with a policy to really fight crime and bring more justice and safety to Canadians?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what we

are doing, but then again, if the hon. member is in fact motivated by statistics, he might find it interesting to know that drug crimes are actually going up in this country and that sexual exploitation of children is going up in this country.

If the statistics are what is motivating him, then he should be the first one on his feet to be supporting us on Bill C-10.

• (1500)

[Translation]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the problem with his policy is that it does not protect victims; it creates victims. The government concealed the fact that it wanted to destroy the firearms registry's database. This is a brutal act that has been widely condemned. The Government of Quebec wants to preserve the data in order to ensure the safety of police officers and the public, and the federal Privacy Commissioner considers that justified. Since the Conservatives are failing in their duty, at the very least, they must stop standing in the way and allow the Quebec government to use the data.

[English]

If the Conservatives do not want to lead, will they at least get out of the way?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for years that member's government was busy targeting law-abiding hunters, farmers and sport shooters and treating them as criminals.

We have consistently opposed this wasteful and ineffective measure, which does nothing to keep guns out of the hands of criminals.

Our government received a strong mandate from Canadians in order to ensure that we end the long gun registry and actually stand up for victims against real criminals.

CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government has a bizarre way of celebrating anniversaries. To honour the CBC's 75th anniversary, the government has decided to stage a witch hunt, led by the member for Peterborough.

Canadians are particularly concerned about the committee's decision to deliberate in secret behind closed doors.

My question is for the chairperson of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics. Can she update the House on the status of the anti-CBC motion?

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, incredibly, a majority of committee members voted to meet in camera at this time to deal with the business before the committee. This keeps our committee deliberations secret and effectively prevents committee members from commenting on the business before the committee.

Oral Questions

I know many members believe Canadians have a right to know, but I must report that the majority of members decided that the public will not be allowed to hear these debates.

[Translation]

Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while the budget for the Prime Minister's Office is skyrocketing under the Conservatives, our public broadcaster has shown remarkable fiscal discipline. Yet the Conservatives continue to attack the CBC. The Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages appeared on television boasting about the draconian cuts and issuing thinly-veiled threats about further cuts.

Will the minister protect the legacy of our public broadcaster and invest in its future?

[English]

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Yes, Mr. Speaker, we are demanding accountability at the CBC. For shame.

For Canadians watching question period today, this is very instructive. The NDP started question period by saying we should not spend more money on fighting crime. Then it said we should not spend more money on the Canadian Forces so that they have the equipment they need. Now the NDP stands up and says, "However, let us give hundreds of millions more to the CBC".

That tells us everything we need to know about that party versus where Canadians stand.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Rodney Weston (Saint John, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today our Prime Minister is en route to the G20 summit in France.

The global economic situation is very fragile, and he will stress to other leaders the need to move forward with critical reforms to achieve concrete solutions at the summit.

Canada still continues to lead with its economic recovery. We have the strongest job creation record in the G7, with approximately 650,000 net new jobs since July 2009, nearly 90% of them full-time jobs.

Can the Minister of State (Finance) please update the House on what the international community thinks of Canada's economy?

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister will represent Canadian interests at the G20 summit and stress the need to reach concrete solutions to support the global economic recovery.

Canada has shown that we have a prudent and responsible economic plan that has helped Canada become one of the strongest economies in the western world. The IMF praised us again this week by saying that Canada has made decisive policy responses to recent economic turbulence; it also applauded our plan to get back to balance as a very necessary step.

That is very important. Our Prime Minister—

• (1505)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Sydney—Victoria.

ATLANTIC CANADA

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Conservative job cuts continue in Atlantic Canada.

First it was DFO, then Service Canada, then ACOA, and now it is Transport Canada. We found out Marine Atlantic has sold two ships to a company in India, when there was a Canadian company that could have bid to dismantle these ships right in Cape Breton.

Not only have we lost 60 good-paying trade jobs, but this would also have been a great economic boost to a local industry. Why is the Prime Minister letting another minister bleed jobs away from Atlantic Canada?

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact the government has invested over \$520 million in Marine Atlantic and has improved the ferry service dramatically. It has been über-successful.

The other parties have voted against all our measures to improve Marine Atlantic service, which is a great boon for the economy and for the people and culture of Newfoundland and Nova Scotia.

Why do those members hate Nova Scotia and Newfoundland?

* * *

[Translation]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday we learned in the World Economic Forum report that Canadian women are still far from achieving pay equity. For every dollar earned by a man, a woman earns only 73¢. The gap is even greater when we are talking about aboriginal, immigrant or disabled women and mothers. Canada ranks 38th—behind Albania, Bahrain and Zimbabwe. Canada has been failing in this regard for decades.

When will the government acknowledge the pay equity problems in this country?

[English]

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have an unparalleled record with respect to women's rights and making sure that the state has obligations in this area. We do not take a back seat to anybody with respect to that issue.

We have certain recommendations in the future that we are pondering, but at this time we are proud of our record and we will continue on.

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Jay Aspin (Nipissing—Timiskaming, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last night our Conservative government passed the ending the long-gun registry act at second reading, which marks a significant milestone toward scrapping the long gun registry once and for all.

Our Conservative government is strongly united behind this proposal. The NDP, many of whose members ran in the last election on ending the long gun registry, is showing some clear signs of disunity.

Could the Minister of Public Safety please comment on last night's vote?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for his hard work on this file.

I repeat that last night the second reading of the ending the long-gun registry act was historically passed by the House on a vote of 152-123, but again many members of the NDP who ran on ending the long gun registry listened to their Ottawa bosses rather than to the voices of their constituents.

However, cracks in the NDP caucus showed up. Members from Thunder Bay—Rainy River and Thunder Bay—Superior North stood up and voted with the government. Among those other members still have time to do the right thing.

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, winter is hitting the James Bay coast, yet as a result of a severe housing crisis, families there are living in tents and cabins. This past Friday the communities of Kashechewan, Attawapiskat and Fort Albany declared a state of emergency.

I am sure the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development shares my concern, particularly with the risk posed to young children and the elderly in these communities. Will he direct his staff to work with the communities and the Mushkegowuk tribal council to address the severe housing crisis in those communities and get these Canadian citizens the decent housing they deserve?

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from the member for Timmins—James Bay. Of course, my officials have worked with the first nations on the James Bay coast and will continue to do so there, as well as elsewhere.

For example, we provided significant funding for the Attawapiskat First Nation on the James Bay coast for housing. This included a significant boost from our economic action plan and funding dedicated to a new subdivision, in which 44 houses have been completed.

We are actively working with first nations towards greater effectiveness and accountability in housing managed—

• (1510)

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. member for Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia.

Points of Order

[Translation]

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, to justify their ideological decision to destroy the firearms registry data, the Conservatives are prepared to do anything, even mislead the public. The Minister of Public Safety said, "the information was created under a specific piece of legislation...It would be unlawful for the information that was collected to remain in the hands of individuals after the legislation is repealed." That is absolutely not true. The Privacy Commissioner, Jennifer Stoddart, has confirmed that it is indeed legal to transfer the data to Quebec.

My question is simple: why is the government lying to the public?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has introduced legislation to scrap the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry once and for all. Our legislation will destroy the records, which are inaccurate and unreliable and becoming increasingly so over time.

I hope that the member has the decency to apologize; if not, I hope that you, Mr. Speaker, will take the appropriate steps for the unparliamentary language that the member used.

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: On the upcoming occasion of Veterans' Week, I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of current serving members and veterans of the Canadian Forces, namely Sergeant Bjarne Nielsen, Captain Ashley Collette, Warrant Officer John Hryniw, Sergeant John Carr, Brigadier General Sheila Hellstrom, Lieutenant-Colonel Shirley Robinson, Sergeant Roland Lawless and World War II veteran Mr. Edward Carter-Edwards.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

The Speaker: The Chair has notice of several points of order.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during question period the member of Parliament for Jeanne-Le Ber posed a question to the chair of the committee on access to information, privacy and ethics. I am kind of puzzled by it because it is public record that the NDP actually presented a motion to move the committee in camera. That is public.

What I cannot understand is why the NDP is complaining that it found support for that motion.

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The Speaker: That is not a point of order.

The hon. Minister of Industry.

[Translation]

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring to your attention an incident that happened during question period. It was caused by the member for Bourassa. We know that this member often uses colourful language, but he used the term "blueberry" to describe the hon. member for Lac—Saint-Jean, who is a nice guy, I should also point out. If it had ended there, it would not be an issue. Unfortunately, when the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities rose, the member for Bourassa called him a "lemon", suggesting something that does not perform well, in fact, something useless.

I am sure that the member for Bourassa would not stand for being insulted in the House without putting up a fight. I am asking for common decency: he should withdraw his remarks or apologize to the House.

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is the first time I have heard that talking about fruit is unparliamentary. I did not want to compare apples and oranges, so I chose to speak about blueberries and lemons instead.

[English]

The Speaker: I will take a look at the blues and get back to the House.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Industry.

[Translation]

Hon. Christian Paradis: Mr. Speaker, that was a very predictable answer. That is disappointing. My colleague knows full well that the term is used in a general sense to call someone useless.

Since he does not have the decency to at least apologize or withdraw his remarks, I would ask that you rule on this matter.

● (1515)

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Speaker, I would never intentionally or unintentionally call the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities useless. That would be unparliamentary.

[English]

The Speaker: I will examine it and get back to the House.

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[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8)(b) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to two petitions.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Speaker, I seek the consent of the House to table, in both official languages, documents from the office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer which show, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that the budget line for the Perimeter Institute has increased by 1,270%.

Thus, my questions were appropriate and the accusations hurled at me were unfounded.

[English]

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to table this document?

Some hon. members: No

POLITICAL LOANS ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

Hon. Tim Uppal (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-21, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act (accountability with respect to political loans).

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

VETERANS

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, "How will you remember?" "Comment vous souviendrez-vous?"

[Translation]

I am moved as I rise in the House today to inaugurate Veterans' Week. I would like to thank my colleagues in this Parliament, whether they are practised politicians or new recruits swept in by the popular tide, for taking the time to pay the most important national tribute, our tribute to those resting in eternal peace for the glory of our country and to those who have sacrificed so much for us.

I am of Irish descent and over the generations my ancestors became a part of French Canada. Therefore, I share Quebec's particular view of the world. It is from this perspective that I look at the world and consider the stories of the great wars and the epic battles that I have learned about. Especially as a member of Parliament, and now as a minister, I have come to realize the extent of the sacrifice made by these men and women whose fate was tragic and heroic, but who are too often ignored or forgotten.

[English]

The encounters I have had over the last six months, often in places steeped in history, have proven to be profoundly moving. From Cabaret Rouge, in France, where I paid tribute at the place where the remains of the Unknown Soldier were once buried, to the spectacular Canadian National Vimy Memorial, where more than 11,000 names are engraved, it is impossible not to think about the enormous loss of life and sacrifice.

[Translation]

Looking at the interminable rows of headstones, which seemed to extend forever, I came to a better understanding of the human drama behind each one, each soldier, each family, each story, each hard-hit community, and also of the history of our country.

At first, the colonists of New France and the British fought as enemies on the Plains of Abraham, but they later united to fight for the common cause of peace and freedom. The two founding nations, along with aboriginal peoples and newcomers, fought side by side at Châteauguay, for example, during the War of 1812, at the capture of the unconquerable Vimy Ridge in 1917, or on the beaches of Normandy on June 6, 1944, where the valiant militia of the Régiment de La Chaudière—from Beauce—and members of the Queen's Own Rifles from Toronto joined together to drive back the Nazi invaders and liberate France.

It was this sacrifice by people of many origins that made Canada what it is today, a strong nation that is the envy of the world. The sacrifices of these soldiers have united our country. We are what we are today because of the sacrifices of these men and women who went to their eternal rest, sometimes far away in Europe and other distant places, and who transformed our nation. Some of our soldiers also returned transformed, with injuries to their souls that burdened them until their last breaths.

It is this blood, spilled in the off lands—European battlefields such as Beaumont-Hamel, where 800 Newfoundlanders faced enemy fire, or Korea, Cyprus, Bosnia and, more recently, Afghanistan—that define who we are. As citizens and parliamentarians, we have a responsibility to rediscover these sometimes tragic exploits in order to better understand where we are going as individuals, as a people and as a nation.

Let us recognize today that we are indebted to them for every vote we hold here in this House, for our freedom and for our ability to shape the destiny of our country.

• (1520)

[English]

One does not need to travel all the way to Vimy in France to be a proud Canadian, but I wonder if there is anywhere else on earth where that pride could be felt more intensely than on the ridge overlooking the plain of Douai.

It is not necessary either to go back in time to see examples of dedication, courage and the gift of self. These values of bravery, valour and service transcend time, place and generations. I see it today.

Born in the aftermath of September 2001, where terrorists killed almost 3,000 innocent people, Canada's war on terror hit the ground in Afghanistan and has seen a decade of a strong involvement from large scale military operations to improvements in infrastructure, supporting the opening of schools for girls and providing humanitarian health. However, that came at a great cost as more than 150 Canadians have lost their lives to establish lasting peace.

Many of these men and women who serve our country without hesitation are coming back or returning from the Afghanistan

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mission. Individuals such as Sergeant Nielsen, who we have just recognized, are a symbol of bravery and perseverance.

On Canada Day, July 1, 2010, Sergeant Nielsen was hit by an improvised explosive device in Afghanistan and was severely injured. He lost his two legs, but he stood up today in the House, which made us very proud.

I was privileged to meet with Sergeant Nielsen. What struck me most was his outlook on life. To him, he was simply doing his job. As members can imagine, I was sincerely impressed with Sergeant Nielsen's attitude and his willingness to move forward no matter what. He said to me, "You can lie down and let the world happen or you can get up and do something yourself". Luckily for us Sergeant Nielsen has chosen the latter.

Mr. Nielsen and his comrades are with us today, his comrades who are supporting him and who are supportive of each other, and with whom I have had the privilege of having dinner. They serve our country with pride and conviction. They fought for peace, freedom, democracy and the rule of law.

We thank our men and women for what they are doing, as they continue to do every day to make the lives of the Afghan people better and therefore for us so we can live in a better world.

That is not all. As we conclude the month of women in the military, we also have remarkable women who wear the uniform and continue to do so today, remarkable individuals such as Brigadier General Sheila Hellstrom who was the first woman to earn the title and Lieutenant Colonel Shirley Robinson who has devoted her life to ensuring women have equal opportunities in the military.

Nellie McClung once said, "People must know the past to understand the present and face the future". These women paved the way for all women, not just those who wear the military uniform but all Canadian women, and this is an excellent example for the world.

There are still challenges. Veterans, such as Sergeant Roland Lawless, who is the vice-president of the Veterans Emergency Transition Services, know it too well. Sergeant Lawless devotes his time and efforts to assist our too many homeless veterans in finding the support they need. For this, he deserves our full acknowledgement.

• (1525)

Yesterday, we paid tribute to those who dedicate their lives to caring for and supporting our veterans. I refer to the families, of course, and the loved ones.

When an individual joins the Canadian Forces, he or she does so by choice. That choice takes a heavy toll on that person's family, whether it is being left alone while their loved one is deployed far away or whether it is trying to transition to civilian life after years of being a military family. All too often, it is the spouses and caregivers who are left to provide stability and balance at home. They bear a burden very few of us understand but they, too, deserve our recognition and respect.

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[Translation]

As a nation, we have a duty to remember and honour the exploits of those who died defending our ideals. In Libya, we have again shown the world that we are determined not to allow a dictator massacre his people. This House of Commons is the symbol of our freedom and democracy. It is here that we make decisions on behalf of the nation and here that we make the lives of these people a priority in our country. Thousands of Canadians have paid the ultimate price for this freedom, wherever duty called them to serve.

[English]

As of last week, our country was tragically struck by the death of Sergeant Janick Gilbert and the departure of Master Corporal Byron Greff in Afghanistan.

[Translation]

Those who for their country gave their lives
Should hear the prayers of many at their grave.
Theirs is the most beautiful of all beautiful names.
Compared with them all glory is ephemeral,
And the voice of an entire people
Is like a mother's lullaby to them in their graves.

These are the words of Victor Hugo, which are found in the Canadian Merchant Navy *Book of Remembrance*.

In the coming days, let us feel humbled by the greatness of these fallen men and women, and of those who have served and are currently serving. Let each of us, as Parliamentarians, go to our communities, cities and towns and take the time to quietly reflect and thank them.

[English]

"In Flanders fields the poppies [still] blow...". I would ask my colleagues how they will remember and I thank them for rightly doing so.

Lest we forget. Nous nous souviendrons d'eux.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Minister of Veterans Affairs for his kind words.

On November 11, we will gather at cenotaphs, Legion halls and army, navy and air force halls in communities right across this country from coast to coast to coast to pay special tribute to the over 118,000 men and women who will not be with us on that day, as they have made the ultimate sacrifice and are buried in over 70 countries around the world, and, as the media reported just recently, we have lost a few more.

These men and women sacrificed themselves for peace, freedom and democracy and for the liberation of the free world. We will also remember our troops who served in Afghanistan, Libya, Haiti and everywhere else.

Just like my father once said, when he met a Canadian soldier during the liberation of the Netherlands, they were looking up at Canadian service personnel and saying, "My God, what kind of country do they come from". We live in heaven and most of us do not even know it.

The reality is that the men and women of the services and those in the RCMP gave us our democracy, gave us the country that we call home and gave us the country that we can proudly call number one in the world. We will never apologize for that. We truly have the best armed forces in the world. We also have the greatest veterans in the world. However, just as important, we also have the greatest family support for our veterans.

Yesterday, the veterans affairs committee went to the Canadian War Museum and we were given a very special gift, the gift of remembrance from one of our own here in the House of Commons, the hon. member for West Nova, whose great uncle, John Chipman Kerr, received the Silver Cross in the Battle of the Somme. We saw Mr. Kerr's photo done by A.Y. Jackson. We saw his Silver Cross medal and other medals donated by the family to the Canadian War Museum. We thank the member for West Nova for sharing his family history with all of us. It was very kind of him.

I could single out so many veterans and armed forces personnel but there is one that I would like to single out today. I would like to recognize a sad chapter in our military history.

In 1944, a bunch of Canadian airmen were shot down over Paris. Unfortunately, 26 of them were taken, against the Geneva Convention, to the Buchenwald concentration camp where they were not supposed to go. For quite a while, they were interrogated by the Gestapo. Those men not only showed bravery and courage in what they did but they survived.

There are only 4 of those 26 brave Canadian airmen who were in the Buchenwald camp and we are blessed and honoured to have one of them with us today. Mr. Ed Carter-Edwards of Smithville, Ontario, is with us today, as was recognized by the Speaker earlier. He has shown tremendous courage and bravery. It is his wish that the story of what he and his comrades went through is never forgotten. Just as important, there is no way Mr. Ed Carter-Edwards could have come back to Canada, lived a normal life and raised his family without the loving support of his wife of over 65 years, Lois, who is with him today. We thank her very much for that.

Ed Carter-Edwards and the many other veterans who are still with us from World War II and Korea are examples of the very best of Canada, the very best of what this country had to offer the world. When the world asked, we came calling. Our veterans sacrificed themselves. Those men and women volunteered.

Our aboriginal people were exempted from wars but they went anyway. They formed the greatest fighting force of all time. They showed the true spirit of the maple leaf. Unfortunately, many of them laid down their lives so that we can sit in the House of Commons and debate the issues of the day and look after our families and call Canada number one.

● (1530)

All of us in the House of Commons salute Ed Carter-Edwards and all the current service personnel, those who have served in the past, those who are serving today and the young cadets who will be serving in the future. We thank them and love them all. We cannot thank them enough for all the work they have done. God bless them.

Lest we forget.

● (1535)

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am truly honoured to speak on behalf of my leader and the Liberal Party of Canada as we honour our veterans today in the House of Commons. I want to say at the outset how profoundly I appreciate what veterans have done for Canada in the cause of peace around the world.

As I was preparing my thoughts for today, I was trying to imagine what it must have been like to have served during war. I wondered what it would have been like landing on Juno Beach, or pressing on through the night's skies over occupied Europe, or crossing the North Atlantic in a Corvette during winter wondering if a U-boat was lurking, or fighting at Vimy Ridge or any other Canadian battlefield from Kapyong to Kandahar.

I tried to imagine what it was like to come face to face with the enemy, ready to fight and yet, undoubtedly, worried, to be both brave and human at the same time. I wonder what it was like to be in a fox hole, homesick perhaps, thinking of family, a wife or a sweetheart, or to contemplate what it would have been like to lose a friend on the battlefield and the pain and sadness that would have inflicted on the heart and mind. These are not experiences I would wish to have in my life, but for hundreds of thousands of Canadians this is exactly what they confronted and endured. We, as a country, owe them so much for that.

War and tyranny are awful realities of human history and, sadly, they continue to exist today. Just as war and conflict are realities of the human experience, so are heroism and sacrifice. It is that sacrifice and heroism that brings us here today. None of us here wish to glorify war but we do commit to glorify the men and women who gave themselves for a cause that was greater than themselves.

I am reminded of the wonderful sentiment expressed by John Stuart Mill, who said:

War is an ugly thing, but not the ugliest of things. The decayed and degraded state of moral and patriotic feelings which thinks that nothing is worth war is much worse.

A man who has nothing for which he is willing to fight, nothing which is more important than his own safety, is a miserable creature and has no chance of being free unless made and kept so by the exertions of better men than himself.

That captures the essence of our brave veterans.

On the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month of 2011, I urge all Canadians to observe a two minute wave of silence.

I will close with a story from my home province. Two young men, about the same age, were back on the Island for the summer. Each had recently encountered a life-altering experience. One of them had done an extended tour of duty in Afghanistan as a reservist and the other had just completed a rookie season as a defenceman with the Boston Bruins, capped off by winning the Stanley Cup. The hockey player said to the young soldier, "You're a hero". The soldier looked

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at the Stanley Cup champion and said, "I'm a hero? You won the Stanley Cup". The hockey player replied, "I wouldn't have died for it".

● (1540)

[Translation]

Mr. Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Bloc Québécois and all of its members, I would also like to pay tribute to our veterans.

I rise here today to recognize Veterans' Week. It is very important to commemorate—

The Speaker: The hon. member must have unanimous consent to respond to a minister's statement.

Does the House give unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: There is no consent.

[English]

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Let the record show that when a member of the House rose to pay tribute to the veterans of our country on behalf of his political party, a party with which I do not agree, the members of the Conservative Party would not allow that member to speak.

[Translation]

It is shameful that there are people in this House who do not want to hear the opinions of others. It is shameful.

[English]

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Mr. Speaker, I want to raise an objection to what the member just said. There is no question that I said nothing in response to the request for unanimous consent. I do not know how many of my colleagues over here did or did not. It is inappropriate for the member to make that a partisan comment by referencing the members on this side of the House.

The Speaker: Order, please. The Chair sought the consent of the House and consent was not given.

[Translation]

Mr. Louis Plamondon: Mr. Speaker, I would like to seek unanimous consent once again, as dean of this House, as a member of this House. Like all other members, I would like to pay tribute to veterans on behalf of the four members of my party. I also ask on behalf of the Green Party. I do not see this as a partisan act. I see it simply as a noble gesture in order to say to those individuals who went and fought, and those who gave their lives, that we pay tribute to them.

How is it that I cannot get unanimous consent? This is not meant to be a precedent that I will use any other time. Today is a special day. That is all. I simply want to pay tribute to veterans, like everyone else, as we have always done.

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I am seeking unanimous consent and I appeal to the Conservative members to grant it. It is only fair. The minister said in his speech that this House is a symbol of our freedom and democracy. He said that. I think I should have the right to speak.

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, the Standing Orders say, in response to a minister's statement, that only members of recognized parties can make statements. The Bloc is not a recognized party.

The Speaker: I hesitate to allow this to evolve into a debate. Consent has been sought and consent has been denied. It seems rather straightforward to the Chair.

I will hear the hon. member for Winnipeg North, but I hope it is not just a continuation of debate. Normally, in order to seek unanimous consent, some proceedings have to precede before the Chair would entertain the same question. However, I will hear the hon. member for Winnipeg North and hope that it is on a specific point.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, you will find that parliamentary tradition says that, yes, we do have Standing Orders of sorts. Those are what we are expected to follow. However, if you look back in terms of the tradition of the chamber, what you will find is, on occasion, members have stood and asked for leave to go outside the Standing Orders in order to do the right thing. I would suggest that this is an appropriate request when a member would like to comment on the importance of November 11.

The point of order is to ask for the government to give consideration that this is an exceptional situation in which we believe in the—

The Speaker: Order, please. I am going to stop the member there. As I said, it is very simple for the Chair. In order for the Chair to recognize members of parties that are not recognized parties there needs to be unanimous consent of the House. There is no discretion in that. Consent was sought and consent was denied. We will have to move on.

● (1545)

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Speaker, just to be absolutely clear, when the point was raised by the leader of the Liberal Party that consent had been denied, a member of the Conservative Party rose to say that he had not denied consent. I think, as put on the floor now, the question is was consent denied or not.

Could we have some clarity on that point, since from our side it seemed that some Conservatives said “no”. A Conservative has risen in his place to say that this is not the case. Could we seek clarity on whether consent was or was not denied.

The Speaker: I am happy to provide clarity. Consent was denied. The Chair clearly heard members withhold their consent.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I recognize that a similar point of order was raised by my hon. colleagues from the Bloc, but in this circumstance we have heard it said that members of recognized national political parties, such as the Bloc Québécois and the Green Party, do not have as a right the opportunity to speak when other leaders have spoken as a result of a ministerial statement.

We also know that the House is the master of its own procedures. By unanimous consent, anything is possible. Surely on an occasion when we mark the sacrifices for democracy, voters in the hundreds of thousands who have supported our parties should not be silenced in this place, while we mark the sacrifices of our veterans.

The Speaker: Requests for unanimous consent are neither debatable nor technically votable. It is consent or not. Clearly in this case, to the Chair, there was no consent. It is very simple in that regard.

I now invite the House to rise and observe two minutes of silence to commemorate our war veterans.

[Two minutes of silence observed]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS**

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 104 and 114 I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the ninth report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding membership of committees in the House. If the House gives its consent, I intend to move concurrence of the ninth report later this day.

● (1550)

EXCISE TAX ACT

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonaville—Gander—Grand Falls—Windor, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-342, An Act to amend the Excise Tax Act (funeral arrangements).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I introduced this bill in the last Parliament, and it is very succinct. It is about, as a wise person once said, the two certainties in life, death and taxes. Unfortunately, in this case, paying taxes after death is certainly an indignation that I would like to correct.

The bill would essentially exempt the expenses related to funerals from the GST and the GST portion of the HST.

I look forward to debating this in the House as a nice dignified way for the Government of Canada not to tax a person upon death and have it be a hardship on the family.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS**

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the House gives its consent, I move that the ninth report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs tabled earlier this day be concurred in.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

PETITIONS

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to submit a petition signed by western grain and barley farmers, from Alberta mainly, concerned with the government's ideological plan to kill the Canadian Wheat Board without first holding a plebiscite of its membership, as is required under section 47(1) of the Canadian Wheat Board Act.

The livelihoods of western Canadian farmers are at risk should they lose the clout of the Canadian Wheat Board to set the best price for grain, negotiate fair treatment from the railways and lower transportation costs among the many services it provides.

The petitioners demand that the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food honour their wishes as expressed democratically through a plebiscite.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the following question will be answered today: No. 120.

[Text]

Question No. 120—**Mr. Scott Simms:**

With regard to the planned reduction in human resources for Canadian Heritage listed in the 2011-2012 Report on Plans and Priorities, which positions are being eliminated by the department as a part of this reduction, broken down by employee status, by title, and by program activity?

Hon. James Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the 2010-11 Report on Plans and Priorities shows a reduction of up to 578.6 FTEs from 2010-11 to 2013-14 when compared with the 2011-12 Report on Plans and Priorities.

The Report on Plans and Priorities is a planning document on key departmental priorities.

The arts, culture, official languages and sport are and will remain a priority for the Government of Canada.

Our priority continues to be to serve Canadians by ensuring that we remain efficient and cost-effective in the delivery of our programs and services.

Routine Proceedings

[English]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the answers to Questions Nos. 119, 126, 134 and 139 could be made orders for returns, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 119—**Mr. Robert Chisholm:**

With regard to the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade and Canada's Global Commerce Strategy: (a) what programs will be introduced by the department in 2011-2012 to support the implementation of the strategy; (b) how much money will be allocated to support the implementation of the strategy; (c) what role will be played by regional economic development agencies to support the implementation of the strategy; and (d) what are the details of any analysis conducted for the government concerning key challenges and potential risks that may impact successful implementation of the strategy?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 126—**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaesan:**

With regard to Family Class applications to Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC): (a) broken down by visa office, how many applications have exceeded the processing times listed by CIC's visa offices in each fiscal year, from 2006-2007 to 2010-2011; (b) what is the total volume of correspondence received by the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration about shortening the processing times for family sponsorship applications in each fiscal year, from 2006-2007 to 2010-2011; (c) broken down by visa office, how many officers work on family sponsorship applications; (d) in each fiscal year, from 2006-2007 to 2010-2011, broken down by visa office, (i) how many family sponsorship applications were received, (ii) how many family sponsorship application were denied, (iii) how many family sponsorship applications were approved; (e) what are the five most common reasons for denials in (d)(iii); (f) of the number of applications denied, how many applicants subsequently appealed the decision to the Immigration Appeal Division; and (g) how many applications refused by CIC were given a positive decision by the Immigration Appeals Division?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 134—**Ms. Megan Leslie:**

With regard to the exterior light fixtures controlled or owned by the departments and agencies of the government: (a) what is the total wattage of these fixtures; and (b) what is the government's position on the use of light-emitting diode (LED) technology for the exterior light fixtures controlled or owned by the departments and agencies of the government, as a means of achieving energy and maintenance savings, as well as a reduction in CO2 emissions?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 139—**Mr. Philip Toone:**

What is the total amount of government funding since fiscal year 2008-2009, up to and including the current fiscal year, allocated within the constituency of Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine, identifying each department or agency, initiative and amount?

(Return tabled)

[English]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

*Speaker's Ruling***POINTS OF ORDER**

ORAL QUESTIONS—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the point of order raised on October 26, 2011, by the member for Wascana regarding who ought to be recognized to answer questions posed during question period to the chair of a standing committee.

[Translation]

I would like to thank the member for having raised this matter, as well as the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, the Minister of Veterans Affairs, the House Leader of the Official Opposition, and the members for Bourassa and Charlottetown for their interventions.

[English]

In raising this matter, the member for Wascana stated that the question posed by the member for Charlottetown related to the work of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, which is under the purview of the committee chair rather than under the responsibility of the government or the minister. Noting that committees were masters of their own affairs, he sought clarification about whether it was permissible for ministers to respond to questions on behalf of chairs of committee and suggested that this approach would be a profound change in our long held traditions with respect to the proper functioning of committees.

The leader of the Government in the House quoted from a ruling on a similar matter given on February 8, 2008, at pages 2836 and 2837 of *Debates*, in order to demonstrate that, in recognizing the only individual rising to answer, the Speaker had acted in accordance with the practice established and articulated by Speaker Milliken.

The House leader of the official opposition reminded the House that members of the official opposition chaired several standing committees and suggested that it would be inappropriate for ministers to answer questions on behalf of committee chairs who were from the official opposition.

[Translation]

As members know, three kinds of questions may be posed by members during question period. First, questions concerning the administrative responsibility of the government, or an individual minister, may be directed to the ministry collectively. *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, at page 509 notes:

Questions, although customarily addressed to specific Ministers, are directed to the Ministry as a whole. It is the prerogative of the government to designate which Minister responds to which question, and the Speaker has no authority to compel a particular Minister to respond.

● (1555)

[English]

Second are questions that concern matters of financial or administrative policy affecting the House itself. These are not directed to the Speaker but rather to members of the Board of Internal Economy designated by the Board to respond to them.

Finally, an extremely narrow category of questions may be directed to chairs or vice-chairs of committees. These must be

phrased in a very specific way and can seek limited information only. In O'Brien and Bosc at page 506, it states:

[Translation]

Questions seeking information about the schedule and agenda of committees may be directed to Chairs of committees. Questions to the Ministry or to a committee Chair concerning the proceedings or work of a committee, including its order of reference, may not be raised. Thus, for example, a question would be disallowed if it dealt with a vote in committee, with the attendance or testimony of Members at a committee meeting, or with the content of a committee report. When a question has been asked about a committee's proceedings, Speakers have encouraged Members to rephrase their questions.

[English]

House practices with regard to oral questions are established in this fashion so that the appropriate persons can be held accountable to the House, be it a minister for the executive, a committee chair for a committee or the designated member of the Board of Internal Economy for House administration matters. These categories of questions reflect the principle of distinct legislative and executive spheres of responsibility and accountability, which is at the very heart of our system of parliamentary government. That this very distinction between the executive and legislative may somehow be jeopardized by a minister answering a question directed to a committee chair is the crux of the matter before us. This is no doubt why the member for Wascana asked:

Is it now permissible in the House for ministers to effectively muzzle the chairs of committees and impose on committees the views of the government?

[Translation]

Drawing from O'Brien and Bosc on pages 508 to 510, I would now like to remind the House of the role of the Speaker with respect to replies to oral questions. It states that: there are no explicit rules which govern the form or content of replies to oral questions; the Speaker has no authority to compel a response; the Speaker is not responsible for the quality or content of replies to questions; and finally, the Speaker ensures that replies are brief, within the time agreed to by the House, deal with the subject matter raised, and phrased so as not to provoke disorder in the House, that is that they adhere to the dictates of order, decorum and parliamentary language.

[English]

Coupled with this, of course, is the Speaker's role in recognizing members who rise to reply to oral questions, particularly as there is an expectation on the part of members asking the questions that they receive, at a minimum, a response. As Speaker Milliken explained in the ruling referred to by the government House leader, in recognizing someone to answer a question, the Speaker "is to take a look at those who are standing to answer and choose who is going to answer..." and "...when no one else rises, it is reasonable to expect an answer to a question...". Simply put, it is not for the Speaker to judge who possesses which information and, thus, who might be able to provide the information being sought. As Speaker Milliken put it in reference to the events of February 2008:

[Translation]

...no one else rose. The Member who posed the question clearly wanted an answer and got one, or at least got a response.

[English]

While there may be concerns about the minister rising to reply to a question properly posed to the chair of a standing committee, in this particular instance, the chair did not rise to respond, nor did the other vice-chair of the committee. It is therefore perhaps not completely unexpected that the minister would rise to offer a response related to witnesses from his department, and that the Chair would recognize him in the absence of any other member rising. Nothing in this incident should be interpreted to mean that members should not continue to direct their questions to those who are properly accountable for answering them. It is also entirely reasonable to expect that those to whom questions are directed, in this case the chair or vice-chair of a standing committee, would automatically be recognized by the Chair to respond, provided they are, or course, rising.

The House will understand that the dynamic nature of question period is such that the Chair is frequently faced with split-second decisions on who to recognize. This is as true now as it was for Speaker Milliken. As always, the Chair is aware that each circumstance must be evaluated on its own merits. Were the House to recommend a different way of proceeding, the Chair would of course adapt to that. As my predecessor suggested, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs is well placed to consider this matter and, if it sees fit, to propose recommendations to help guide the Chair in cases such as this.

• (1600)

[Translation]

I thank all members for their attention.

[English]

I wish to inform the House that because of the statements made earlier today, government orders will be extended by 22 minutes.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

FAIR REPRESENTATION ACT

Hon. Vic Toews (for the Minister of State (Democratic Reform)) moved that Bill C-20, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867, the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act and the Canada Elections Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am more than pleased to speak to Bill C-20; however, I believe there had been an agreement among the parties that the first speaker would be from Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Once again, I am more than prepared to give my comments now, but I believe my colleague opposite was rising to her feet to give the initial presentation.

The Speaker: Does the House give its unanimous consent to proceed in this fashion?

Government Orders

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, my apologies to my hon. colleague. I know she was prepared to give comments but I look forward to listening to my hon. colleague in approximately 30 minutes from now. I have much respect for her. I met her for the first time during committee work at the procedure and House affairs committee. She is a new member, and I must say that if all new members conduct themselves in the same way the member opposite does, this Parliament will be very effective in years to come. My congratulations to my colleague opposite.

I am very pleased to speak to Bill C-20, the fair representation act. One thing I can say most assuredly is that, with the possible exception of the four independent members formerly known as the Bloc, all members of this place would argue that Canada is the greatest country in the world. One of the distinctions that makes Canada such a marvellous country in which to live is the form of government that we currently have. One of the foundational principles of our government that we currently see enacted in Canada is the concept of representation by population.

This government believes, and it is a fundamental principle of our democratic process, that each Canadian's vote should have the same weight. In other words, a vote in one region of the country should have the same weight as a vote in another region of the country. Unfortunately, that is not the case right now. There are regions of this country that are seriously underrepresented. By that I mean there are regions of this country that have a population base far higher than the number of elected representatives that they have. We have recognized this inequity for many months.

In fact, in our last election campaign we made three distinct promises. First, we promised to ensure that the faster growing provinces, specifically British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario, would gain more seats in the House of Commons. Second, we promised that the smaller provinces would be protected in their seat count. Third, we promised to ensure there would be fair and proportional representation to the province of Quebec in relation to its population.

We made those commitments. We plan to act on those commitments. Bill C-20 reflects those commitments.

Currently, there is a formula which has been in place since 1985 and basically deals with how many seats there are in this place. I will get into the technical details in a few moments, but I should probably first address a common complaint that I and I am sure many other members have heard about whether we should increase the number of seats in the House of Commons. I have heard from a number of my constituents who have argued very emotionally that we should not increase the number of seats at all, that we have too many seats in the House of Commons right now. Some have suggested that we even reduce the number of members in the House of Commons.

Government Orders

I can understand those arguments, but it is also an argument that is very easy to make without much thought behind it. It is similar to someone saying that a CEO of a particular company makes too much money and that no one should be allowed to make that amount of money. Similarly, people can say there are too many members of Parliament in Canada and that we do not need that many. Whether one tends to argue in favour or against that notion, we have some restrictions constitutionally that would prevent us from reducing the number of seats that we have right now.

Back in 1915 there was a constitutional provision that is known as the Senate floor rule, which says quite clearly that no province should have fewer members in the House of Commons than it has senators.

I put as the case in point the province of Prince Edward Island which has four senators, and conversely, four members of Parliament. Based simply on population, one would think that is some form of inequity because the province of Prince Edward Island only has 140,000 people, yet it has four members of Parliament. In other words, each member of Parliament represents approximately 35,000 to 40,000 constituents. Contrast that to my home province of Saskatchewan, where each member of Parliament represents roughly 80,000 constituents. Contrast that to constituencies and ridings in Ontario where some members represent 170,000 people or more. There is great inequity across Canada.

• (1605)

Since we cannot reduce the number of seats without unanimous consent from the provinces, which I doubt we would get, we believe our only alternative to try to ensure effective representation by population is to increase the number of seats. Since the last census which was taken 10 years ago, we have seen the population increase in Canada, and it has been significant. We have also seen that the population has increased most dramatically in three particular provinces: British Columbia, Alberta, and most noticeably, Ontario.

If we believe in that foundational principle of representation by population, we then must address the situation of inequity. Our solution, although there will never be a perfect solution I would argue, is contained in Bill C-20. I believe it is a fair, a principled and a balanced approach trying to get closer, at least, to representation by population by increasing the number of seats, particularly in those three provinces.

Also contained in Bill C-20 is what we call the representation rule that provides for any province that is now either equally represented by population or overrepresented by population should never become under-represented when we change the seat count in the House of Commons. I say that because that reflects on Quebec.

Right now, Quebec is slightly overrepresented. Why do I say that? Quebec has roughly 23% of the total population of Canada, yet the number of seats it has in the House, 75, represents about 24% of all the seats. Our bill would ensure that British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario gained extra seats because they have rapidly growing populations, but Quebec, if we left the number at 75 seats, would be under-represented. Therefore, we plan to give three additional seats to the province of Quebec to ensure that it would be equally represented. That is what the representation rule in Bill C-20 contemplates. By giving Quebec three extra seats to bring its total to

78 seats, Quebec would then have a percentage of the seats in this House almost identical to the percentage of population that Quebec has in the country. That is what we mean by equal representation and representation by population.

Specifically, the bill contemplates British Columbia receiving 6 extra seats, Alberta receiving 6 extra seats, and Ontario receiving 15 extra seats. Would that make it absolutely equal in terms of representation by population? No, it would not, but it would come much closer than the situation we have right now. Would we ever achieve a perfect harmony of equal representation? I cannot see it, certainly not in my lifetime. Why? Because the population of Canada and the population from province to province is always a bit of a moving target. We would never achieve total equality, but this bill tends to address the current inequity in the House of Commons by giving more seats to those provinces that have a higher population and have been increasing their population in the last 10 years.

I am going to get into some of the technical details of the bill right now. It is a bit dry. If I see members opposite nodding off, it is not that they do not find my presentation compelling; it is merely that it is a bit of a dry and tedious process to go into the technical aspects of the bill, particularly the formulas.

I want to start with the current formula. I should also explain how we have arrived at that formula because it was established back in 1985. I told the House about a provision of the Constitution called the Senate floor rule, which was enacted in 1915. In 1985, there was another constitutional provision that was enacted which is called the grandfather clause. That clause contemplated that no province that was represented in the House of Commons should lose any seats from the 1985 totals.

• (1610)

Consequently, Saskatchewan has 14 seats today in the House of Commons. If we look at the actual representation by population, Saskatchewan should only have 10 seats, but because of the 1985 grandfather clause, no province, whether it be Saskatchewan, Manitoba or some of our Atlantic neighbours, will see a reduction in its seat count in the House of Commons. That is something we have to live with and that is contemplated in Bill C-20.

Parliamentarians of the day felt that the formula enacted in 1985 was proper and would deal with representation by population effectively, but unfortunately it actually served the purpose of restricting the number of seats in the future. Whether or not the population of our country grew or grew rapidly, the number of seats would be restricted because of the 1985 formula.

I will explain that formula.

First they took the population of Canada and divided it by the number of seats in the House of Commons, which was 279 at that time. That final total was what they called the "electoral quotient".

Then, province by province, they divided the provinces' populations by the electoral quotient and came up with the provincial seat count. They then knew roughly how many seats each province should receive. However, they then had to add in the two constitutional provisions: the Senate floor, which ensured that no province has fewer seats than the number of senators, and the grandfather clause, which considered and contemplated that no province should lose seats from the current total in 1985.

The end result was that they had an initial seat count, and then a secondary seat count when they took into consideration the grandfather clause and the Senate floor clause. Then, once they had the provincial seat count, they added one seat per territory; that total ended up being the number of seats in the House of Commons.

I think I went through that without seeing too many nodding heads. A couple of people's eyes glazed over, but we will move on.

While that approach was perhaps appropriate in 1985, if we used the same formula today, we would unfortunately come out with a House that was seriously under-representative, and the three provinces that have had rapidly growing populations would be very much affected.

Consequently, we have proposed a new formula. At a later time I will allow my other colleagues to go into a more detailed discussion of what that formula does and what it means, but I can assure everyone that the formula we are proposing will ensure that we are much closer to representation by population, now and in the future. It does not restrict the number of seats in the House based on the 1985 formula; rather, it is a formula designed to reflect the number of seats that may be needed, both now and in the future, based on population.

The first thing we need to do is recognize that if we want true equity in this place, we need to accept and adopt Bill C-20. Is it perfect? No. Is it the closest thing to equal representation that we have seen in many decades? Yes, I would argue that it is.

Following that, however, and on the assumption that Bill C-20 will pass this place, we also have to deal with the second part of the equation, which is how to redraw the various boundaries. It is one thing to say we will have 30 extra seats in the House of Commons, but it is another thing to say where those seats will be held.

• (1615)

The equal boundary representation act is also included in this bill. It would provide that each province, after we determine the number of seats in each province, would establish a boundaries commission whose job would be to consult with stakeholders, provinces, and other affected people, including members of Parliament who wish to make submissions, and within a set period of time to come up with a new boundary map for each province.

The whole process, from the consultation process to the final product of redrawn boundaries, should be done roughly within the year.

Of course, those boundaries then have to be examined. MPs and others in Parliament, including committees, would have a chance to examine the boundaries presented. In that fashion, we should be able to come to a solution that would allow the four provinces I mentioned, the three fastest-growing provinces plus the province of

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Quebec, to have not only new seats in place, but new seats with completely new and freshly drawn boundaries.

I should also point out one of the things that would happen during the boundaries commission examination would be an opportunity for new names for these various ridings, because not only would there be completely new ridings, I am sure, presented by the electoral commissions, but there would also be hybrids. By that I mean that certain constituencies we have now would have similar boundaries, but instead of having one member, they might have two members.

In conclusion, I believe that Bill C-20, while not absolutely perfect, is the closest thing to equal representation by population that we have seen in many years. It would construct a plan and a formula to ensure that provinces now and in the future would have the representation they deserve.

I think it is patently unfair that in the current situation there are constituencies across Canada whose members of Parliament are representing over twice as many constituents as other members of Parliament. We have to come to a closer balance of rep by pop. I believe Bill C-20 would do that. It would do that effectively. I would ask all members to give it support. I look forward to the continuing debate.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have been a member of this House since 1996, and this is the first time that a minister is not participating in the debate about his or her own bill. It is quite ironic that it is a bill on the democratic practices in this House. It is quite sad.

My colleague has been very candid. He said the bill is not perfect. Indeed, it is not.

Since his constituents are rightly telling him that it does not make sense to add seats in this House, I would ask him why we are not trying to achieve the same result—better proportionality in the House for provinces—while keeping 308 seats. It is certainly doable.

We cannot change the Senate clause, but we—this House, the Parliament of Canada—have the power to change the grandfather clause. We do not need it. We could have the same result for the fastest-growing provinces and for the provinces that are growing more slowly. We could have the same result, the same percentage by province, with 308 seats.

Why does my colleague not agree with that? Does he have one person in his constituency who is asking to have more seats in this House?

• (1620)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated in my earlier presentation, we are committed to representation by population and nothing more. The formula we have put forward in Bill C-20 would achieve that.

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It is incumbent upon this government and, I would suggest, upon Parliament to ensure that we respect the parliamentary and democratic principle of representation by population. The suggestion that the member opposite is making would not address equal representation; he is merely suggesting that we take the current number of members of Parliament and divvy it up somehow across Canada.

However, we have to respect the Senate floor and we have to respect the wishes of the provinces. I can assure members that the provinces are on side with the plan we have put forward. Many provinces have come forward to say they are pleased to see us moving forward with Bill C-20. I would ask my friend opposite to do the same.

[Translation]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his speech. We believe that this bill poses some problems and that it might pit the provinces against one another. Some provinces have already raised legitimate concerns about this bill. Does the hon. member believe it is quite possible that some provinces will be pointing fingers and clashing over this bill and that this could be problematic for various communities across the country?

[English]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I respectfully disagree. I do not think any provinces will be pointing fingers because, as I pointed out, the provinces who have faster-growing populations would receive additional seats, and they have already indicated that they are very happy with that outcome; the provinces with smaller populations would not lose any seats, and they are very happy about that.

I go back to what I said in my earlier presentation. Is it perfect? Of course not. No bill can possibly be perfect, given the fluctuating population base in this country, but is it closer to effective representation by population than anything we have seen before? I would argue that it is. Provinces would be happy, and they have already indicated their satisfaction to us.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons what he thinks about the fact that in 2006, here in this House, he was one of the hon. members who voted in favour of the motion recognizing Quebec as a nation. It was not the first time Quebec was recognized as a nation in this House, but in 2006, the vote was unanimous. That is why the Government of Quebec, and even Quebec's National Assembly, unanimously, have adopted more than one motion to say that Quebec's political weight here, in this House, absolutely must remain the same. With the disinformation the government is promoting about its Bill C-20, they are only talking about demographic weight. I would like the parliamentary secretary to make the distinction between demographic weight and political weight. The nation called Quebec—and there is a Canadian nation as well—is being penalized by this bill because it directly diminishes the nation's political weight.

[English]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, again I reject the analysis by my colleague opposite. In fact, just the opposite is true. The representation rule that would be enacted in Bill C-20 would ensure that Quebec, now and in the future, would get equal representation. I mentioned that right now Quebec is slightly over-represented; this bill would ensure that it would have equal representation. It has slightly more than 23% of the population of Canada and it would end up having slightly more than 23% of the seats in the House. It would gain three seats. It would go from 75 to 78 seats. That is fair, equitable, balanced and principled.

We have committed to that principle. We will bring Bill C-20 forward, which would ensure that Quebec, now and in the future, would have fair and proportional representation based on its population. That is a fair approach. I would encourage my friend opposite to support Bill C-20.

• (1625)

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Again, Mr. Speaker, Canadians do not want more MPs. They pay for enough. What they want is fair representation. It is what my colleague spoke about. If we are able to achieve fair representation with 338 seats, we are able to do it with 308 seats. We just have to respect the Senate clause; otherwise, some provinces may have fewer seats. What they want, to be sure, is that they will not lose their representation. Sometimes it is better to be 10 out of 50 than 12 out of 100. That is the point Liberals are making.

If the minister were here, I would tell him that. If he wants to avoid making Canadians angry over this bill, he just has to come back with the same percentage by province using 308 seats. That is achievable.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before we hear the parliamentary secretary's response, I would remind hon. members that it is not in the rules that we refer to the presence or absence of other hon. members in the chamber.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, once again, I am a little confused. The member opposite, for the second time in his intervention, has mentioned avoiding getting provinces angry. There are no provinces that are angry over this bill. No province would see a reduction in the number of representatives it has right now, and smaller provinces are very satisfied with that; the provinces that have seen increased and fast population growth would receive additional seats, and they are very happy about that.

In fact, we will find, as Bill C-20 is implemented in the months and years to come, that Parliament would reflect the population of this country in a far more effective and representative way than it ever has before.

[Translation]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech, especially his praise for my colleague, a woman I have known for years. I like to brag about the fact that I managed to convince her to run for the first time in 2008. I get a deep sense of personal satisfaction from that.

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I applaud the government for introducing a bill to try to bring fairer representation to this House and to reflect some Canadian realities. However, these same ideas have already been introduced.

Could my colleague tell us whether the government will respect the need for in-depth debates? The committee will have to dig deep to find the best possible option. Our party introduced similar bills a number of times. I think that we can really find something that would satisfy the greatest number of people.

[*English*]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I did not know that my hon. colleague was the one who convinced my other colleague to run, so I congratulate both of them.

With respect to the comments as to committee work, I agree that real work on the bill will be done at committee, such as the examination of the technical aspects of the bill. Quite frankly, I am happy to hear that Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition agrees with us because we want to get this to committee as quickly as possible.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before we resume debate on the current motion, it is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Cape Breton—Canso, Air Canada; the hon. member for Windsor West, G8 Summit; the hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, Committees of the House.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today we have the opportunity to debate Bill C-20, the Fair Representation Act.

This bill has a history. It dates back to the 39th Parliament and since then it has undergone some revisions and changes. As it currently stands, Bill C-20 illustrates the Conservative government's desire to make some constructive changes to the makeup of this House. The proposals in Bill C-20 also seek to enhance the effectiveness of democracy in Canada and improve representation.

However, what the bill is proposing does not appear to have been well received. It did not take long for reactions from the provincial legislatures to reach Ottawa, and Quebec dismissed the Conservative government's proposals right away. Ontario and British Columbia also raised some legitimate concerns regarding this bill. This response is significant, as it illustrates how poorly balanced the government's approach was regarding the redistribution of seats in the House of Commons.

The provinces reacted as they did because they felt that the initiative was confused and saw that the government was trying to satisfy them with a pittance. It has come up with practically random figures to which the Conservatives are attaching expressions like "fair representation" and "proportional democratic weight". The very terms for what we are debating are flying around in every direction. The provinces understand very clearly that there is some confusion and that when there is confusion, there is some flexibility and room for negotiation.

This feeling of confusion stems primarily from the successive changes that have been made to the bill over time and that reveal considerable hesitation on the part of the government. After all, at the outset, Quebec was not given any additional seats. The government sensed the danger, however, and had the good sense to change its mind. I am sure my colleagues can imagine how the Quebec National Assembly would have reacted had the government not changed its mind.

The Minister of Industry, the member for Mégantic—L'Érable, said: "This bill will move every Canadian province toward representation by population." This remark was repeated by the parliamentary secretary who just spoke.

I would like to know if the government plans to use this criterion alone for the new seat allocation. If that is the case, it demonstrates an approach that is narrow in vision and not very serious. In fact, strict representation by population is certainly not the only criterion that should be applied when seats are redistributed. It would be a denial of all the things that make Canada what it is. We need only examine all the clauses used to calculate the number of seats to support that. It seems that the minister is denying what is protecting Prince Edward Island's four seats.

The NDP will stand with the provinces that want us to continue fine-tuning Bill C-20. We acknowledge that the government wants to take action and get it right, but we believe that there is too much hesitation on the government's part and therefore that there is room to negotiate.

I am very pleased to be able to debate this bill. The NDP believes that there is a consensus in the House about the importance of fair and intelligent reform of our democratic institutions. After all, we have everything to gain with a more representative Canada.

I am in federal politics because I am convinced that Canada's strength is rooted in its diversity. The problem of fair representation of the provinces in the House comes up regularly because Canada is changing and its Parliament must reflect these changes. This issue seems simple, but is unexpectedly complex. It also stirs up passions and triggers all sorts of hidden emotions.

Canada is more than just the sum of the 10 provinces and 3 territories. Since confederation, two visions of the country have often clashed. These two visions refer to very different and almost opposite sensibilities that we have tried to reconcile as best we can since the beginning of the federal experience. That is the basis for John Saul's idea of a civilization that compromises. As my Canadian history professor used to say, Canada is a community that is always fraught with bickering. As a Quebecker, I know what I am talking about.

The first of these two visions, considers provincial authority as an end in itself. It focuses on the provincial legislature, local distinctiveness, local cultural heritage and, in the case of Quebec, language. Of course the emotional attachment to Canada remains present and real, but confederation is clearly perceived as a supranational entity.

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That is clearly the case in Quebec. While it is well known, it is sometimes misunderstood in other parts of Canada: in Quebec, ties to the state are twofold. That is completely normal. Quebec preciously guards the memory of its past and still feels the presence of the other state it once was: New France. Quebec's specificity is so important that this government even took the initiative to give it the status of a nation within Confederation.

Quebec is not the only province in this situation. Take Newfoundland, for example. It was the last province to join Confederation. It had its own currency, flag and national anthem, and its people are still very conscious of their common origin.

• (1630)

Some might even say that Newfoundland has its own language. It joined Confederation 80 years after the founding provinces, after a long history as an independent British dominion. Consequently, Newfoundland had the time to develop a feeling of national allegiance that Ottawa, as a distant and mainland capital, cannot shake, even after 60 years.

I would also like to mention the more subtle case of the Northwest Territories. Northerners live a common frontier experience in a tough environment that is both beautiful and remote. The ethnic balance between aboriginals and non-aboriginals has created a distinct type of country with its own ethnically diverse culture that is incredibly dynamic.

I could go on and on because this is such a fascinating topic, but what I am trying to express is that this vision requires one essential element: balance. When balance is maintained, this decentralist vision does not call into question the relevance of this federal plan and encourages cultural and creative development across our country. The NDP, which is so committed to diversity, is very sensitive to the differences that exist, to varying degrees, in each province.

There is the opposite, highly centralist vision, which sees the federal government as responsible for building the Canadian nation. This vision is behind the notion of nation building. It is a state of mind that promotes unity within the country by focusing on all that is similar at the expense of all that is different. The Constitution Act, 1867, seemed to favour that vision of Canada, but that vision took a hit during the constitutional debates of the 1980s and 1990s. It was, however, the initial cause of sweeping Canada-wide achievements and it is dear to many of our constituents whose values are reflected in it.

It is simplistic to divide the provinces between these two visions. This vision has its roots in the British imperialism that Canada was part of. The Constitution of 1867 was drafted in that vein and we can say without a doubt that Canada as we know it today is a legacy of that time.

Ontario, the most populous province and the most under-represented in this House, has its cultural and political origins in the British colonial era. It is completely justified. The Prairies also find a common cultural foundation in that history. They were constituted as the logical next step in the federal project and steeped in British patriotism. Canada has its history and we do not seek to diminish it.

The Conservative Party clearly favours a more centralist plan. For this government, the federal government and its institutions have the responsibility to build this country. Canada, as the Conservatives see it, has to be moulded from the same clay. Differences have to give way to common elements. It is the Canada of "The Maple Leaf Forever". Their interpretation is as old as the country itself and meets come people's expectations. However, those who share the decentralist vision feel there is a lack of finesse in these democratic reform bills that the Conservative government is introducing in this House. They all have one thing in common: they all attempt to make fundamental changes to the parliamentary institutions without ever having to touch the Constitution.

Bill C-20 is nothing but a weak attempt at giving this House the semblance of fair representation of the provinces that make up Canada. Bill C-20 is just another attempt at doing something when it is clear that no one really knows what to do. The NDP has a vision. Our party has a deeper understanding of what constitutes Canada's wealth and we want to move forward in respect and collegiality.

For example, the NDP explicitly recognized Quebec's distinct nature in Bill C-312, introduced by my colleague, the member for Compton—Stanstead. In short, the NDP proposed that we keep the previous formula for calculating how seats are allocated in the House of Commons, while still guaranteeing that Quebec would retain its political weight of 24.35% within the House, the percentage it had when it was recognized as a nation in this House.

As much as we acknowledge that Bill C-20 is a step forward compared to the earlier versions, there is still a lot of work to be done before it will be acceptable. I condemn the fact that the Conservative government does not have enough strength to take action. At first glance, this so-called strong mandate is not translating into a willingness and a vision to truly move Canada forward. It takes guts, initiative and courage to turn words into action.

Yet when it comes to petty politics and pitting the provinces against each other, this government is one of the best. For proof, we need only look at the provinces' reactions to Bill C-20. With this government, it is one step forward, two steps back.

The problem is clear. The provinces want a number of seats that corresponds as closely as possible to their demographic weight. Since Quebec was recognized as a nation within Canada, it is asking to retain its weight at 24.35%.

• (1635)

The NDP is of the opinion that these two requests are fair and must be defended. The NDP believes that, in order for Canada to work better, it is absolutely necessary that the provinces and their unique characters be represented as accurately as possible. Only the NDP can do this because we have a much better understanding of what Canada wants. Our vision is to make Canada a true success, to make it the best country in the world. We want to debate the role of our parliamentary institutions with respect, rigour and, most importantly, a listening ear. This quality is essential.

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The basic problems with the representation of the provinces in the House of Commons, namely the chronic under-representation of Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia and the concrete recognition through action of the Quebec nation, are far from irreconcilable. However, there are still concerns. The fact that the Ontario premier is not hesitating to speak out shows his concern about this bill, which must be fair to Ontarians. The same goes for the premier of British Columbia, who is asking for no fewer than the seven seats that were provided for in a previous draft of the bill.

The Quebec Minister responsible for the Reform of Democratic Institutions feels the same way. He believes that Quebec's political weight in the House of Commons should not be decreased. In 2006, this House unanimously adopted a motion recognizing Quebec as a nation within Canada. The constitutional consequences of that decision are unclear. The NDP wants to maintain Quebec's weight in the House of Commons.

Given its status as a nation within a united Canada, Quebec has a special place and we must reflect that fact. All these examples clearly bring one undeniable fact into focus: the provinces are asking the government to listen to them. If the Conservative government continues to turn a deaf ear, it will soon be perceived within the federation of Canada as a steamroller that has little regard for the provinces. First, it was the Senate; now, it is the House of Commons. A trend is becoming painfully clear.

Not only do we need to move away from the verbal rhetoric of simply stating that Canada is the best country in the world, we also need to take real action to prove it. We need to do justice to Canada's diverse, complex character. Our parliamentary institutions need to reflect that. Openness to compromise and negotiation is essential.

I would like to know the point of undertaking reform if it is only done in half measures. In the wake of a slew of democratic deficits, the Minister of State for Democratic Reform is suggesting that we merely apply a band-aid solution. Similar to the arbitrary and constitutionally questionable Senate reform this government wants to implement, this addition of seats to the House of Commons only masks the issues. And when it comes right down to it, no one will be happy.

Why does this government seem unable to successfully reform this country's parliamentary institutions? As the NDP has clearly stated, the first logical step is to consult provincial leaders. We are still at the bill stage and sensible improvements can still be made. But there is still one quality that is painfully lacking in this government: the ability to listen, the decency to listen to the provinces and other interest groups. This is not simply a trivial, procedural issue. We need to ensure that each Canadian citizen has the assurance that the House of Commons is a solid representation of the Canadian reality.

It is quite ironic that, because they have their blinders on, the Conservatives are unable to fully grasp Canada's complexity and diversity. This goes far beyond the simple addition of seats to the House of Commons, as the Conservative government is proposing. Creating more cynicism in and contributing to the alienation of the Canadian people with regard to federal politics is the last thing we want to introduce as legislation in Parliament. But it seems that the government's priority is exactly that.

The formula used to calculate how seats in the House of Commons are allocated is a reflection of Canada's diversity and complex nature. The grandfather and Senate floor clauses are proof of that. The idea of democratic representation goes far beyond these mathematical formulas, but we must look even further than that. The solution being proposed by the Conservative government does not address any of these demands. This bill leaves a number of provinces fundamentally under-represented in this House and it decreases the electoral weight of the Quebec nation.

However, all of these changes can be made, but the Conservatives do not seem to know what to do. To start, they offered some crumbs, then a little bit of meat, but at the end of the day, everyone ends up disappointed. That explains the NDP's disappointment with Bill C-20. The formula used to calculate the seats allocated to each province was changed from what the government presented in the last version of this bill, which was introduced in the previous Parliament. That was already different from the formula that is used now, which dates back to 1985.

I would like to focus on this subject for a moment because I have a hard time following this government's parliamentary gymnastics and acrobatics. First of all, Bill C-12, which was introduced in the House during the previous Parliament, changed the redistribution formula by changing the electoral quotient by which a province's population is divided.

• (1640)

The preamble of Bill C-12 states, and I quote, "Whereas the national average population of electoral districts at the 40th general election was approximately 108,000 persons...". That is how it was determined that the electoral quotient, in order to divide the province's population—before applying special clauses—would be 108,000. They simply speculated at the time, with the help of estimates from Statistics Canada, about what the redistributed seats might look like using that formula. So this created certain expectations among the provinces. It is not surprising that Bill C-12 never passed.

Then comes along the current bill on fair representation. The Conservative camp has simply shuffled the cards to come up with a new formula for allocating seats to the provinces. Here is where the confusion begins. Here is what Bill C-20 says about the new electoral quotient to be used:

Whereas the electoral quotient for the readjustment that follows the completion of the 2011 decennial census should be 111,166, that number being the average population of the electoral districts on July 1, 2001, which was determined by using the estimate of the population of each province as at that date, multiplied by the average of the rates of population growth of the provinces.

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If I understand correctly, the new electoral quotient comes from a mathematical formula that comes from an estimate of the current population that dates back to July 1, 2001. Two questions immediately come to mind. First of all, why use population estimates that are over 10 years old? Why the mathematical acrobatics? Is it because the statistics from back then are more reliable than today's? And second, why use the average rate of increase in the population of the provinces? As we have heard repeatedly in this House, the rates of increase in the population of each province are not all the same.

Ontario is growing faster than any other province. So why this levelling out? How can the government justify creating expectations among the provinces with Bill C-12, only to turn around and crush them so deviously and cunningly with Bill C-20? Did the government really expect the provinces to fall for this trick?

The issue of representation in the House of Commons is complex and goes beyond simple representation by population, a factor that is very important nonetheless. The Supreme Court issued an interesting opinion in this regard. On June 6, 1991, it concluded in *The Attorney General for Saskatchewan v. Roger Carter* that factors like geography, history, community interests and minority representation may need to be taken into account to ensure that legislative assemblies effectively represent the diversity of the Canadian social mosaic.

This means that the bill to redistribute seats in the House of Commons must take other factors into account. No matter what this government says, this exercise in effective representation is not irreconcilable with equal representation of the provinces that have had significant population growth. In short, we must continue to work on this bill, listen to the provinces and arrive at a solution that benefits everyone.

I move, seconded by the member for Welland,

That the motion be amended by deleting all of the words after the word "that" and substituting the following:

this House decline to give second reading to Bill C-20, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867, the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act and the Canada Elections Act, because it:

(a) adds and allocates new seats in the House of Commons in a way that would increase regional tensions in Canada;

(b) fails to take into account the need for a nation-building approach to changes in Canada's democratic representation; and

(c) ignores the principle unanimously adopted in this place that the Quebecois represent a nation within a united Canada.

• (1645)

[English]

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. There have been discussions among the parties, and I believe you would find consent for the following motion.

I move that it be an instruction to the legislative committee on Bill C-18 that the committee postpone clause-by-clause review of Bill C-18 in order to permit the legislative committee to travel throughout Canadian Wheat Board designated areas in western Canada for the purpose of meeting with experts and farmers who would be affected by Bill C-18; and that in relation to its study of Bill C-18, the chair and 12 members of the legislative committee be authorized to travel

in western Canada from November 14, 2011 to November 18, 2011, and that the necessary staff accompany the committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The amendment is in order.

The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

• (1650)

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like some clarification.

Imagine that, one day, in the House, we decided to say that a certain region of our country was unique and special. In such a case, would the NDP change the formula for assigning seats to that region? Is that the NDP's policy?

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his question.

Clearly, when we are speaking about the importance of recognizing the weight of the Quebec nation in the House of Commons, we are referring to the House's unanimous decision to recognize Quebec as a nation within Canada. We are therefore not talking about just any consideration or unique aspect. We are talking about something that was recognized and received a unanimous vote. Quebec has been recognized as a nation. Given this recognition, it seems completely legitimate to me, in this specific case, to say that it is important to maintain Quebec's political weight.

I believe that this is the best thing to do in this case.

[English]

Mr. Kyle Seebach (Brampton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, coming from the riding that had the largest population in all of Canada in the last census, I would like to ask my friend across the aisle how she could rationalize saying that there should be more representation than what is being given under the Fair Representation act to Quebec when the voters in Brampton West have half a vote compared to voters in her riding. There are twice as many voters in my riding as hers, and she is saying that should continue and in fact get worse.

What does she have to say to the voters of Brampton West? Why does she not think they are entitled to have the same votes as people in her riding?

[Translation]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his question.

We are in Canada. We have certain special characteristics, as I explained in my speech. We live in a country where we cannot, all of a sudden, decide to decrease the number of members of Parliament in certain regions on the pretext, for example, that they are far less populated than other regions. We cannot make such decisions. It is normal for there to be some imbalance. Everyone wants to work to ensure that the imbalance is as minimal as possible and that we operate fairly. No one wants to deny that right.

We recognize that Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta are currently under-represented and that this must be remedied; however, it is not by pitting the provinces against each other and by comparing them that we are going to solve Canada's problems. It is important to recognize the variety of identities within Canada and in each region and province. The best way to do so is to support the hon. member for Compton—Stanstead's bill.

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech, which was truly excellent. The NDP introduced a bill that would be an alternative to the government's bill. In our bill, we talk about keeping Quebec's percentage at 24.35%, while the government would keep it at 23%. What difference does that make? For the Quebec nation, it is extremely important to keep that 1%. Could my colleague explain how important it is?

• (1655)

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: Mr. Speaker, I thank my excellent colleague for her comments and her question. In fact, what is important here is acknowledging the fact that, since Quebec was recognized as a nation within Canada by this House, the least we could do is allow Quebec to retain the political weight that it had in the House of Commons at the time. We are not simply talking about a stable demographic weight or anything like that. If the government wants to acknowledge the fact that the nation was recognized, and that that was not just empty rhetoric, it must take concrete action accordingly. In my opinion, maintaining Quebec's political weight in the House of Commons is completely justifiable.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the hon. member's speech and I was very impressed. However, I have a very specific question to ask her.

Does her party feel that there are not enough members in the House and that 30 more need to be added? Has she heard her constituents, the people in her riding, say that we need 30 more members, even though the government is slashing the public service? Is that something she would be proud to tell her constituents? Or does she think, as the Liberal Party does, that we can get the same results—in terms of provincial representation in the House—with 308 seats, without adding a single one?

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville for his question, which was, as always, specific and intelligent. In the present situation, this bill is trying to correct the under-representation of three provinces that are dramatically under-represented. A solution has been presented, but that does not mean it is the only one. I am sure that there are others. For now, the proposals have been submitted. We also understand that eliminating some of the current sections regarding the political weight of provinces in the House of

Commons could, for example, lead to fewer members from certain provinces. We do not necessarily want that to happen.

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the hon. member, who was elected just a few short months ago, who spoke of changes, improvements and negotiations in the entire process, whether she has noticed that with the Conservative government, there is no room for compromise. Four or five times already, bills have been subject to time allocation motions. In committee, they bulldoze their way through everything. The Conservatives select the witnesses; they make sure the debates are as short as possible. I have a hard time believing there is any chance for change or improvement in this bill.

I would like to know whether the hon. member shares my opinion on this. Given the fact that the NDP introduced a bill to preserve Quebec's political weight and given the fact that it has proposed an amendment, does the hon. member and do the NDP members intend to vote in favour of this bill at second reading stage? Yes or no?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent for a brief response.

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to say to the hon. member that, indeed, it can be quite difficult at times to discuss anything with this government. We just had a very concrete example of that when his colleague was unable to address the House to commemorate Remembrance Day. We were very disappointed with that decision.

As far as the negotiations are concerned, we remain open. We want to try to work and move forward. It is our duty as parliamentarians to do as much as we can.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise here in the House to state the Liberal Party's position on Bill C-20, whose main goal is to rebalance the allocation of seats in the House of Commons, taking the needs of those provinces that are growing quickly into account.

The principle of provincial representation by population in the House of Commons is enshrined in our Constitution. Paragraph 42 (1a) of the Constitution Act, 1982 stipulates that any amendments to this principle must have the consent of Parliament and the legislative assemblies of at least seven provinces representing at least 50% of the Canadian population: we know that as the 7-50 formula.

We should all be proud that our Constitution formally confirms this principle of representation by population. It is a fundamental principle of democracy.

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• (1700)

[English]

Alas, nothing is ever so simple in our lively federation. In Canada, we tweak representation by population to take another factor into account. We take great care to assure the political representativeness of the provinces that are in absolute demographic decline, they are losing people, or in relative decline, their population is growing at a slower pace than the Canadian average. We are so careful about this that we are one of the federations where the distribution of seats between constitutional entities is the least numerically representative of its population.

[Translation]

We even established a floor below which a province's representation must not fall: no province can ever have fewer members than it does senators.

The Senate floor clause has been in the Constitution since 1915, in section 51A. It can also be found in subsection 41(b) of the Constitution Act, 1982. In order to amend this section of the Constitution Act, 1982, all members of the federation must give unanimous consent.

[English]

Hence, Prince Edward Island has four senators according to the Constitution, so it has four members of Parliament, whatever the size of its population.

The four Atlantic provinces cannot have less than 30 seats in the House because that is their number of senators. This legislation would give them eight seats more than what strict proportional representation would give them.

In a 1987 ruling, the B.C. Supreme Court stated that “the principle of representation ‘prescribed’ by the Constitution does not require perfect mathematical representation...”. A year later, the B.C. Court of Appeal said that what must be preserved “is the principle, not a specific formula”.

In other words, Parliament has some leeway in how it applies the principle of proportionate representation of the provinces when dealing with the provinces that are in relative decline. However, that leeway has its limits. Parliament cannot run afoul of this principle. That would be unconstitutional.

Today, we are close to the limit. This is what the most recent Statistics Canada pre-census data shows. In Ontario, there is 1 MP for every 126,000 people; in New Brunswick, 1 for 75,500 people. As we can see, the numbers need to be re-balanced.

This will be the third time the Conservative government tries to perform this rebalancing act. In its first attempt in 2007, the government proposed adding seats for British Columbia and Alberta but left Ontario almost completely out. When Premier McGuinty objected, the federal minister for democratic reform at the time insulted him by calling him the small man of Confederation.

[Translation]

In its second attempt last year, the federal government ignored Quebec, making it the only province with a relative population decline to be under-represented.

This time, the bill introduced by the Minister of State for Democratic Reform on October 27, would give British Columbia and Alberta an additional six seats and Ontario an additional 15. Quebec would receive three seats to better reflect its demographic weight. As for the other six provinces, they would continue to be over-represented.

[English]

One serious drawback of this plan is that it would increase the number of MPs from 308 to 338. I am sure nobody in the minister's riding is asking for that. A 30 seat hike is not something to be taken lightly. Canadians are concerned about the added cost of such an inflationary measure.

The government wants to slash the civil service and gorge itself with more politicians. That is nonsense. In these days of financial restraint, Parliament must take the lead.

As our Liberal leader recently insisted, the number of MPs cannot keep growing forever. We would quickly reach a much higher MP to population ratio than is the norm in other democracies.

We must not forget that in our decentralized federation there are many pressing issues, such as schools and hospitals, that federal members of Parliament do not have to address.

In the United States, a country almost 10 times as populous as ours, the house of representatives is limited to 435 members. Why not follow its example and limit the number of seats in the House to its present value? Nothing can stop Parliament from doing that.

We do need to rebalance the House's seat allocation in order to address the needs of the provinces with strong population growth, maintain proportionate representation of the other provinces and protect those with smaller populations in keeping with the Senate clause. It is possible to do that without raising the total number of MPs. It is doable. We would have no problem doing that, so why not do it?

• (1705)

[Translation]

Therefore, I look forward to debating this issue in the House.

By introducing this new bill, the government is committed to allowing members and senators, together with the best experts, to thoroughly study the repercussions of the bill.

Democracy itself is at stake and I am firmly convinced that the government and the opposition should definitely be able to vote together on a bill with respect to this issue. Because, despite our political differences, we are all democrats in this House.

It is possible that we will come to an agreement. The government only has to rebalance the numbers, but this time keeping the number of seats to 308.

Having said that, I am not sure that we will be able to obtain the support of the NDP, which believes, because Parliament recognized that Quebec forms a distinct nation within Canada, that Quebec's representation in the House of Commons should be frozen at its current level in perpetuity.

I believe, as do a number of constitutional experts, that Parliament does not have the constitutional authority to infringe to this extent on the principle of proportional representation without the support of at least seven provinces representing at least 50% of Canada's population. It is important to respect the Constitution.

We still have a lot of work to do on this bill.

I would like to take this opportunity to ask the government and the minister, once again, to do the right thing with regard to its ill-conceived Senate reform plan. What good would it be to Canadians if we improve the House of Commons but make the Senate completely dysfunctional? This Senate reform plan is harmful and even dangerous, since it will weaken our entire Parliamentary system, including the House of Commons.

Why is this bill dangerous for our democratic decision-making mechanisms? Because, by pitting two elected houses against each other, without a constitutional mechanism to resolve their differences, it would create a state of institutional paralysis similar to what our American neighbours are experiencing.

● (1710)

[English]

What is the government thinking? What do the Prime Minister and the minister have in mind with their ill-conceived Senate reform project? Do they really want to import into Canada the same kind of ritual opposition and institutional paralysis we have seen in the United States and Mexico? Do we not have enough challenges here in Canada that we also need to hinder our decision-making processes in such a senseless counter-productive manner?

Would the government tell British Columbians, Albertans and the rest of the country what logic underlies its decision to shortchange them in the Senate while, at the same time, it is proposing increasing the number of seats in the House for British Columbia and Alberta?

Why do the minister and the Prime Minister, two Albertans, want to hurt their province? Do they not understand how detrimental it would be to B.C. and Alberta to end up with an elected and powerful Senate where these two provinces would be grossly under-represented with only six senators each, while some provinces have 10 with a population four or six times smaller?

The government knows that an elected upper chamber would carry much more weight in its dealings with the House of Commons than it does in its present form. What is the government's interest in creating such a mess for those two provinces?

[Translation]

How is it that, when it comes to adding seats in the House, the government seems to want to respect the spirit and the letter of the Constitution but, when it comes to Senate reform, this same government is ignoring the Constitution?

Government Orders

Why is the government being so inconsistent? Why the double standard?

[English]

Where is the logic? Where is the fairness? Changing the character of the Senate must not be done through a process that excludes the provinces.

[Translation]

Why does the government want to impose an unconstitutional Senate reform plan that will create pointless legal disputes between the provinces at a time when, on the contrary, all our governments should be working together to address the many economic and other problems that are upsetting Canadians and causing them concern?

The Liberal opposition intends, as always, to be constructive and thorough. In the past, we asked the government to amend its bills to make changes to the House of Commons since they were ill conceived, and it listened. Perhaps, the government would agree to once again listen to us, to the benefit of all Canadians, by seeking to achieve the same objectives with Bill C-20 without increasing the number of seats in the House.

We are also asking the government to think about our objections to its Senate reform plan, a plan that is irrational, unconstitutional and dangerous.

[English]

Clearly, it would make no sense at all for the government to undo with one hand what it wants to do with the other.

Hon. Tim Uppal (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my colleague's speech. The problem is that when the Liberals were governing, they were used to having winners and losers in the provinces. They would pick winners and losers. This is a fair formula that we brought forward for all the provinces. It brings every province closer to representation by population.

My question to the member is, which provinces, under his plan, has he picked to win seats and which provinces would he take seats away from? Which provinces, under his plan, would be the winners and which ones would be the losers?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Speaker, the answer is very simple. Everybody would be the winner because nobody wants more seats in this House. Canadians want fair representation, and we are in agreement with that.

What is important is which provinces would be so under-represented that they would need to be rebalanced. We know which provinces they are: Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario. However, other provinces would still be over-represented even if we stayed at 308 seats. At the end of the day, this is what Canadians want; they do not want to forever increase.

My question to the minister is, when will it end? In what other country, in order to rebalance the seats between its provinces or regions, is it always an issue to add? Is it France, Germany, or the United States? The answer is none of them.

Government Orders

They are all able to rebalance and have proportional representation that is fair for everyone. This is what we need to achieve. We may achieve it by keeping the same number of seats in this House.

[Translation]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, fundamentally, I do not think we can put a price on life or democracy. I am very disappointed to see that my colleague is a fan of doing nothing and that he even wants to make Canadians pay the price.

A few weeks ago, I heard about a debate going on in Calgary, where there are very few city councillors. It seems to be a problem, because they are not saving money. Calgary city councillors must hire a very large staff to be able to manage their massive electoral districts.

We must reflect a country's dynamic, and I think that more seats in the House would reflect that dynamic. Which province would my colleague like to see pay the price of decreasing its political weight in the House?

• (1715)

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Speaker, this is the only parliament where a member could rationally claim that we are doing nothing when we are trying to avoid increasing the number of politicians at a time when we are asking Canadians to tighten their belts. Almost all of his constituents will tell him that it makes no sense to increase the number of members of Parliament. That is not what they want. They want their province to be represented. Being 10 out of 50 is better than being 12 out of 100. That is the heart of the issue here. It is the percentage that we represent in relation to the total. It is not the number we have. It is a matter of having a fair percentage in proportion to the population. That is what would happen with this bill, which provides for 338 members of Parliament, but we could achieve the same thing with 308 members of Parliament.

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to hear the hon. member who just spoke talk about another issue. We feel that Bill C-20 is an attack on Quebec's political weight.

What does the hon. member think about the bill introduced by the Conservatives, particularly from Quebec's point of view and given that the House has recognized the Quebec nation? I would also like to know how the Liberal Party will be voting at second reading.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Speaker, the second aspect, that we come to an agreement here on this issue, is very important to the Liberal opposition.

We are not ready to throw in the towel. We agree with the bill's objectives. We have been calling for this for a long time. The government improved its bill in comparison to previous versions. We believe that the same results can be achieved with 308 seats instead of 338. To answer the minister's question, as a Quebecker, I would not care if seats were taken away from Quebec, as long as our proportion remains the same. I say that as a Quebecker. I would rather we had 70 seats out of 100 than 75 seats out of 200, if I can use such a drastic example. I would not care if Quebec lost seats, as long as the proportion of Quebeckers remains equal to its representation within the Canadian population. That is the issue.

If the hon. member wishes to forever freeze a province's representation in the House by, let us say, keeping that province from ever dropping below a certain percentage—as the NDP has proposed as well—I would respond by saying that he wants to give Parliament a power that it does not have. It would flout the power of the provinces. It would be asking the Canadian Parliament to tell the provinces that they will go unheard and that Parliament works alone. I cannot accept that. I want Quebec's National Assembly and other legislative assemblies to have their say if the government proposes to freeze a province's representation forever, which would go completely against the principle of proportional representation of the provinces, as established in the Canadian Constitution.

Mr. Raymond Côté: Mr. Speaker, I find the hon. member's responses to be absolutely unbelievable. Let us take a look at the Canadian reality. In Ontario, there are exactly the same number of seats in the Ontario legislature as there are—

Hon. Peter Van Loan: That is not true.

Mr. Raymond Côté: It is not true? I am sorry. I thought it was exactly the same number. It is possible. The fact remains that the National Assembly has more seats than Quebec has members in the House. Is the hon. member suggesting that the National Assembly is going too far in the number of seats it has? That seems totally inconsistent to me.

On the contrary, a legislature has to be able to represent the demographic weight, the cultural weight, the political weight, the regional linguistic realities, and so on. This can result in an unequal configuration. What is more, that is the case when we talk about the different Canadian provinces. There are tremendous inequalities that are perfectly justifiable. How can the hon. member justify the status quo, which I have already condemned?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Speaker, it is the same question, and it calls for the same answer. It is not the status quo. We can do better work if there are fewer of us. When there are too many of us, we do not work as well. That is true in every organization in the world. It becomes a bureaucracy. There comes a time when there are too many MPs.

We are a decentralized federation. We do not have to manage the hospitals and the schools in our ridings. We can focus on our work. We simply need to give MPs more help if they are having a hard time doing their work. We do not need to increase the number of MPs. We do not need any more MPs in the House than we already have. We were doing good work when there were 280 of us, and now we are 308. I think that is enough. The Americans have 435, but they have 10 times the population. Do we need to get to 435 to realize there are too many of us? At what point will the hon. member say that the number of MPs we have does not make any sense? We can very well stay at 308 and rebalance representation of the provinces in the House.

• (1720)

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in relation to the last comment made by my colleague from Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, I would like to ask him if he thinks we can compare ourselves to the United States in that regard. Does he believe that the 69 members in Iceland who represent the 300,000 inhabitants there should cut their parliament in half? What number should be sought in proportion? I do not understand why there should suddenly be a global standard for the number of parliamentarians in a parliament.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Speaker, that exists everywhere. People compare the number of parliamentarians to the population in every country. Canada is currently becoming an inflationary country in that regard. Just when the government is slashing the public service, when we do not have enough environmental inspectors, the government wants to increase the number of politicians.

I am certain that if I went into all of my colleagues' ridings and defended my point of view, everyone would applaud me. People would say that they do not want more politicians, that we have enough as it is and they should do their jobs better. We do not need to increase that number by 30 or 40.

[English]

BILL C-20—NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The fair representation act is important for Canada's democracy. In view of the upcoming census results and redistribution, it is important that the bill is passed in a time fashion. I thought the opposition agreed.

We have heard the member for Hamilton Centre and the NDP critic for democratic reform say that if we did not have these seats available for the next election then, quite frankly, the government will have failed. We agree with him.

However, as is evident from the motion that was moved earlier today by the opposition that this not proceed past second reading, I regret to advise that agreement has not been reached under the provisions of Standing Orders 78(1) or 78(2) with respect to the second reading stage of Bill C-20, an act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867, the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act and the Canada Elections Act.

Under the provisions of Standing Order 78(3), I give notice that a minister of the Crown will propose, at the next sitting, a motion to allot a specific number of days or hours for the consideration and disposal of proceedings at the said stage.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I rise on the same point of order. I wonder if it is safe, now, for us to assume, because there are rules that we have in place inside the Chamber that help facilitate debate so that members of Parliament can actually contribute. I know the current Government Leader of the House of Commons is a big fan of the whole time allocation thing. As opposed to negotiating in good faith with opposition House leaders, he prefers to come down with the majority big stick saying, "No more debate. Let's shut it down".

Is this the kind of majority government we can anticipate—

Government Orders

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. This is not a point of order, so we will continue.

The hon. minister of state.

SECOND READING

Hon. Tim Uppal (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to have this opportunity to speak about fairness and representation for all Canadians.

In the last election and in previous elections, our party committed to Canadians that we would address the growing unfairness in representation. During the last election, we made three distinct promises to ensure that any update to the formula allocating House of Commons seats would be fair for all provinces.

First, we would increase the number of seats now and in the future to better reflect population growth in British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario.

Second, we would protect the number of seats for smaller provinces.

Third, we would protect the proportional representation of Quebec according to its population.

Our government received a strong mandate to move toward fair representation in the House of Commons, and we are delivering on that commitment.

Bill C-20, fair representation act would provide fair representation for Canadians living in the fastest growing provinces of Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta.

First, I would like to outline the problem that we need to fix.

According to our Constitution, every 10 years the number of House of Commons seats allocated to each province is revised. The way this is done is through the seat allocation formula explained in section 51 of the Constitution Act, 1867.

The seat allocation formula in place now dates from 1985. Back in 1985, our predecessors in this place faced a decision. They could either allow the size of the House of Commons to grow roughly in line with population growth, or they could attempt to restrain the growth of the House of Commons. They decided on a formula that would restrain the growth in the House of Commons. In doing that, they entrenched a seat allocation formula that would remain anchored in the past and that would not properly account for population growth in the future.

The most obvious and unfortunate result was that the representation of Canadians in our largest and fastest growing provinces was discounted. In fact, population growth was largely ignored by the formula and fairness in representation for Canadians suffered more and more as time went on. To be fair, the problem was not simply with the formula. It was flawed, certainly, but it needed help. Our population growth patterns were that help.

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Population growth since the mid-1980s has seen significant higher than national average growth in Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta. Population growth in those provinces has been even higher in large urban and suburban areas. Under the 1985 formula, the population of these three provinces have become significantly and increasingly under-represented due to the population growth.

This has caused a representation gap. This representation gap should, of course, be addressed. To illustrate the need for addressing this representation gap, we look no further than the riding of my colleague from Brampton West. He joined me for the announcement of the bill last week in his riding and his riding is the perfect example of the need for this bill.

Brampton West is home to the largest number of Canadians in any one constituency at over 170,000 people. That population figure was as of the 2006 census, over five years ago. Truly that number is even higher right now. That 170,000 people compares to an average national riding size of just under 113,000 people. In fact, only our four largest provinces have average riding sizes of over 90,000 people.

Brampton West is represented by one member of Parliament, though its population alone could warrant almost two in most other areas of the country. Brampton West is also home to a considerable number of new and visible minority Canadians. Canada's new and visible minority population is increasing, largely through immigration. These immigrants tend to settle in fast growing communities like Brampton and in our fastest growing provinces like Ontario.

These three factors, high immigration to fast growing regions of the fastest growing provinces, combine to magnify the representation gap to these regions. This situation inadvertently causes new Canadians and visible minorities to be even more under-represented than the average.

It is clear for all to see that this situation undermines a principle of representation by population in our country. Brampton West is the most extreme example of the representation gap, but it allows us to put the problem into perspective.

If left with the status quo, the representation gap experienced by Canadians living in fast growing provinces and constituencies will grow even more striking. If left to grow worse, this gap could seriously threaten the legitimacy of our claim to being a representative democracy.

• (1725)

It truly is that important. This is a serious problem that requires an immediate solution. I propose that Bill C-20 would be that solution.

With the fair representation act, our Conservative government would deliver a principled and reasonable update to the formula allocating seats in the House of Commons.

The bill would do a number of things. It would move every single province toward representation by population in the House of Commons. It would address the representation gap by moving Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta significantly closer to representation by population. Using the formula put forward in the bill, Ontario would receive 15 new seats, British Columbia would receive 6 new seats and Alberta would receive 6 new seats. The bill

would increase seat counts for these provinces, both now and in the future, by ensuring that population growth would be more accurately factored into the seat allocation formula. In this way, the foundation principle of representation by population would be much better respected and maintained, now and in the future.

At the same time, the bill would ensure that smaller and slower-growing provinces would maintain their number of seats. The legislation would also fulfill our platform commitment to maintain Quebec's representation at a level proportionate to its population. Quebec has just over 23% of the provincial population and it would have just over 23% of the provincial seats in the House of Commons. That is what we have promised and that is what will deliver.

Since the purpose of the bill is to move every single province toward representation by population in a fair and reasonable way, Quebec will receive three new seats under a new representation rule applicable to all provinces should they need it. This rule will ensure that no province that is over-represented will experience representation less than what is proportionate to the population after any future seat adjustment. The reason for this is simple and fundamental. While the relative weight of provinces may fluctuate, our seat-allocation formula should ensure that efforts to move under-represented provinces closer to representation by population do not also bring over-represented provinces under the level which their populations warrant. This is in support of the principle of proportionate representation and is one of the fundamental principles in our Constitution, right alongside representation by population.

It would not be fair or principled to enact a formula that could punish a smaller or slower-growing province in that way. This rule is to be part of the fair balance that we must strike.

We have an obligation to enact a formula that better respects and maintains representation by population. The bill would do this. We have an obligation to enact a formula that ensures the effective and proportionate representation of all provinces, especially for smaller and slower-growing provinces. The bill would do that. We have an obligation to enact a principled formula with national application that is fair for all provinces. The bill would do that. We have an obligation to work together to ensure that the vote of each Canadian, to the greatest extent possible, has equal weight. The bill would do that. Canadians rightfully expect fair and principled representation in their democratic institutions. I think this bill would provide that as well.

I would like to discuss the details.

As I have stated, Bill C-20, fair representation act, would update the constitutional formula for allocating seats in the House of Commons among the provinces. The seat readjustment formula has been updated by Parliament a number of times since Confederation, each time seeking to strike a balance among the principles I just outlined. Parliament acts through its authority to amend the Constitution in relation to the House of Commons under section 44 of the Constitution Act, 1982. This was the same constitutional authority under which the existing formula was passed in 1985. I want to make it clear that we are on firm and well-travelled ground.

The seat allocation formula operates by determining an electoral quotient which, theoretically, represents the average population per seat and then dividing the population of each province to determine the initial number of seats per province. Once initial seat allocations are produced, the formula provides additional seats to certain provinces, according to the two minimum seat guarantees outlined in the Constitution.

Added in 1915, the Senate floor guarantees that no province can have fewer seats in the House of Commons than it has in the Senate.

● (1730)

Added in 1985, the grandfather clause guarantees that no province can be allocated a number of seats that is less than the number of seats it had in 1985.

The final step adds the total provincial seats and one seat for each territory to determine the total number of seats.

The representation gap I spoke of earlier stems from this point. The current 1985 formula sets 279 members as a permanent divisor in determining the electoral quotient, and 279 was the number of provincial seats in the House of Commons at the time that the formula was passed in 1985.

The House then had 282 seats, 279 provincial seats and three territorial seats. This divisor of 279 was not allowed to readjust over time to reflect the actual number of provincial seats in the House of Commons, currently at 305.

The combined effect of fixing the divisor at 279 and the seat guarantee to slower growing provinces is this. It prevents faster growing provinces from receiving a share of seats that is in line with their share of the population. Faster growing provinces have accordingly become significantly and increasingly under-represented in the House of Commons, relative to their population, and are likely to become even more under-represented in future reallocations under this existing formula. This is clearly not fair.

The fair representation act would provide an updated allocation formula that would move every province toward representation by population and significantly reduce the number of increasing under-representation for the faster growing provinces.

The electoral quotient with the 2011 readjustment will be set at 111,166. This number reflects the average riding population prior to the last seat re-adjustment in 2001 and increased by the simple average of provincial population growth rates.

The Senate floor and grandfather clause would continue to apply.

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The representation that I spoke of would also apply, such that if a currently overrepresented province becomes under-represented as a result of the application of the updated formula, additional seats would be allocated to that provinces so its proportional representation, according to population, is protected.

For the purpose of calculating the provincial seat allocation, provincial populations would be based on Statistics Canada's annual population estimates from July 1, 2011. These estimates correct for undercoverage in the census and provide the best data available on provincial populations and therefore the most appropriate data with which to determine provincial seat counts.

For the 2021 readjustment and each subsequent readjustment, the electoral quotient would be increased by the simple average of provincial population growth rate since the preceding readjustment. The result is a larger increase in the number of seats in the House of Commons compared to the current 1985 formula, both in the next readjustment and in the future readjustments.

These increases will more accurately reflect population growth across the country and will provide for far closer representation by population. The increasing representation gap would be closed and Canadians would be represented much more fairly.

Where and how the House of Commons seats are distributed within provinces is a separate and distinct process that will remain largely unchanged. Once the number of seats per province is established, the process set out in the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act is used to readjust and redistribute electoral boundaries within the provinces.

The readjustment of electoral boundaries is taken in accordance with census data, as it has always been, which provides population counts at the geographic level that is necessary to most accurately revise electoral boundaries.

The independent boundary commissions that determine the electoral boundaries for each province will continue to be constituted in the same way and will continue to operate unchanged. This independent boundary commission process was established in 1964 and was amended slightly in 1979. There is no change to that aspect of the process.

The fair representation act does include amendments that would streamline the timelines governing the boundary readjustment process to ensure that it will be completed and in effect before the end of our government's mandate. The changes proposed to the boundaries readjustment process are aimed simply and solely at streamlining the process.

● (1735)

Moreover, each proposed change to the timelines has been recommended previously in some form by the Chief Electoral Officer, the procedure and House affairs committee, or the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing, known as the Lortie commission.

These changes should streamline and modernize the process. They have taken into account recommendations expressed by Elections Canada.

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While the timelines are changing somewhat, the process itself remains unchanged and independent.

To conclude, the fair representation bill is a principled nationally applicable update to the formula that allocates seats to the House of Commons. It is fair. It is reasonable. It is principled. It solves a problem that needs to be fixed and that will only grow worse if we fail to act. It will achieve better representation for faster growing provinces while maintaining representation for smaller and slower growing provinces.

I will say it again: Canadians rightfully expect fair and principled representation in their democratic institutions. The fair representation bill delivers on this expectation and delivers on our government's long-standing commitment.

I strongly encourage the opposition to work with us in passing this principled and reasonable legislation as quickly as possible to ensure the vote of every Canadian has equal weight to the greatest extent possible and as soon as possible. I look forward to continuing my work with all my colleagues in the House to ensure that happens.

● (1740)

[Translation]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to the speech given by the minister for democratic reform.

Clearly, taking a first step towards rebalancing the political weight and representation in the House is a good thing. However, given that there is a risk that the debate will be cut short again, I am very worried because we have some proposals to make. The minister just reached out, asked us for suggestions and proposed working together, but I have to wonder under what conditions we might be working.

Unfortunately, I have a feeling that this offer was merely for show, merely to look good in the eyes of the public. How could we possibly get the government to listen to us and hope to move this bill forward in co-operation with the provinces under the conditions imposed on us?

[English]

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Speaker, this is a formula that is principled and applicable to the entire country. It is fair for the entire country as it brings every province closer to representation by population. There has been debate about this in the House. There will be further debate about this in the House of Commons. Then there will be opportunities to speak about it further in committee.

What Canadians want us to do is to move forward. This government received a strong mandate to bring fairness in representation and to bring every province closer to representation by population. We are moving forward on that. We have made this commitment and we will follow through on that commitment.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I agree with the minister's conclusion that Canadians want to have proportional representation in the House that would be fair for every province.

I will say to the minister that the bill he tabled is much better than the two other attempts by his government. I think we are much closer

now. However, I reiterate my point that we may achieve it without adding one seat in the House.

If the minister has heard Canadians say that they want more MPs or more politicians, he should tell me because I have not heard one Canadian say that. Canadians think the system is fair with 308 seats. That is enough. We could achieve the same percentage by province that he has mentioned by staying at 308.

It is true that my province of Quebec would have fewer seats but our representation would be as good as it is in the bill. To have 70 seats in Quebec out of, let us say, 250 would be better than 78 out of 338. I am sure it would be the same for all my colleagues in all provinces. What is important is the representation of a province, not the number of seats.

Could the minister tell us if, after working with experts, he came back with another scenario of 308 seats, what that would mean for fair representation?

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Speaker, the fact is we live in a very large country with varying populations. Along with that, to complicate the issues, we have constitutional guarantees of seats for certain provinces, for provinces that have slower growing populations and populations that have moved to other parts of the country.

We made a commitment in the campaign that we would protect the seats of those smaller provinces. We made a commitment in the campaign that we would bring the provinces of Alberta, B.C. and Ontario closer to representation by population. It is only fair that the people living in those provinces have their vote counted, to the greatest extent possible, equally, just like the other provinces. We are moving forward on that commitment by bringing every province closer to representation by population.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Madam Speaker, following on the question from the Liberals, I have had difficulty with this. We saw two incarnations of this legislation in previous Parliaments, neither of which had an increased number seats for the province of Quebec. As much as the government members may think I do not have much intelligence, I think I have a reasonable knowledge of how this system works, but I have no comprehension whatsoever as to how they came to the number of three additional seats for the province of Quebec.

With regard to that, I want to take some credit for my party for having pressed the government into recognizing all the various considerations that go into increasing the number of seats in this House. The Conservatives' responsibility as government in proposing this type of legislation is to take into account the historical rights that the province of Quebec has in terms of an equilibrium of seats and its right to have fair representation in the House. I congratulate the Conservatives for finally moving on that and I take some credit on behalf of my party for seeing them do that.

I come back to my basic question. How did they come to the three seats? I have no way of understanding that.

● (1745)

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure to answer the question.

That fact is we committed that Quebec would have representation equal to its population. The numbers work out like this: Quebec has 23% of the population and it will have 23% of the seats in the House of Commons, which would require it to get three additional seats. That is where those three seats come from.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Madam Speaker, I am enjoying this discussion with the minister. I want to tell him how important it is for me that we agree at the end of the day. We are all democrats and it would be good to agree.

I am sure Canadians would prefer 308 seats rather than 338 seats. No one is asking for more MPs. We do not need that many in Canada. The United States has 435 seats for ten times the population that Canada has. We do not need to add any seats. We could achieve the same goals that are in the bill by keeping the same number of seats. I know Quebec would have fewer than 75 seats, but the representation for Quebec would be the same. This is what is key for Quebecers.

I am telling the minister that we have the constitutional power to do it. We need to keep the Senate floor rule clause, and it is good, but the grandfather clause can be changed by Parliament alone. We do not need to have a long constitutional discussion about that. It would be much better for Canada.

I am asking the minister, when would we stop adding seats? When would we say there are enough seats?

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Speaker, the hon. member's proposal would have us change some legislation and not change the Senate floor rule, which would actually leave some provinces over-represented and other provinces continue to be under-represented.

What we have done is to bring forward a principled formula that brings every province closer to representation by population. At the end of the day, the Liberal proposal would have us open up the Constitution and get into long drawn-out constitutional battles that no Canadian wants. What Canadians want is to be fairly represented in the House of Commons. Further to that, they want this government to continue to work on the economy and work on jobs and not get into the long drawn-out constitutional battles that the Liberals want.

[Translation]

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Madam Speaker, my question has to do with the comments made by the minister just now.

I am a bit concerned that he thinks Canadians do not want a debate on this issue. I do think that Canadians want a debate on this issue because we are talking about a constitutional amendment. That is huge.

I would like the minister to reconsider his comments. I would also like him to talk about the fact that the government decided to limit discussion on this issue.

[English]

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Speaker, the fact is, yes, Canadians want to hear debate. There is debate on this bill and there will be more debate on this bill as there is on every bill. We give more than enough time to debate bills in the House of Commons. What

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Canadians really want is action. Canadians gave this government a strong mandate to move forward and that is what we are doing.

Mr. Sean Casey: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, there have been extensive discussions on this topic and I believe we finally have agreement. If you were to seek it, I believe you would find unanimous consent for the following motion: That it be an instruction to the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs that it travel for the purpose of meeting with veterans as part of its hearings into the impact of the recent decision by the Conservative government to cut over \$200 million from the Veterans Affairs department, that it be an instruction to the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs to hold hearings in each province and territory, and that in relation to this study, the 12 members of the Veterans Affairs committee be authorized to travel within Canada no later than December 16, 2011, and that the necessary staff accompany the committee.

• (1750)

The Deputy Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion. Does the House give its consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, there have been no extensive consultations. There have been two of these so far today and the members are misrepresenting what is going on. They should not be saying there have been extensive consultations when they have been consulting themselves.

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate. The hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh has two minutes to begin making his comments.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Madam Speaker, since there is no use going into the topic itself in that short period of time, let me make a few comments about the government moving time allocation.

This will now be the sixth time in about 40 sitting days that the government has moved time allocation. It is fast approaching matching the former Liberal government in its 2000 to 2004 term of office with the number of time allocation motions it moved, although the Conservatives are way ahead of the Liberals in terms of the period of time within which they did it. It took the Liberal government of the day about 130 sitting days to move time allocation on nine different occasions. The Conservatives are up to six time allocation motions already in a little over 30 days.

We have seen incarnations of this bill twice in previous Parliaments and each time there is a difference in the numbers. There appears to be a different rationale each time.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member will have 18 and one-half minutes to make his comments when this bill is next before the House.

[Translation]

It being 5:52 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

*Private Members' Business***PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

[Translation]

PARLIAMENT OF CANADA ACT

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP) moved that Bill C-306, An Act to amend the Parliament of Canada Act (political affiliation), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Madam Speaker, this evening we are debating Bill C-306, An Act to amend the Parliament of Canada Act (political affiliation), which concerns the foundation of our democracy. Before debating the bill, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate my colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore on his excellent work over the years to ensure that this bill was introduced in each new session of Parliament. It is an honour for me to introduce it once again and to have seconded it the first time.

The bill provides that a member's seat in the House of Commons will be vacated and a by-election called for that seat if the member, having been elected to the House as a member of a political party or as an independent, changes parties or becomes a member of a party, as the case may be. However, I would like to point out that the seat will not be vacated if the member, having been elected as a member of a political party, chooses to sit as an independent.

I believe that this bill will help restore Canadians' faith in our democracy. For these reasons, I am asking members on all sides to support it. Recently, the government proposed certain political reforms, and we hope that it will show that it takes them seriously by supporting this bill.

This bill also reflects a fundamental objective of my party, which is to do politics differently in order to renew people's trust in elected officials. It is unfortunate that, in a number of surveys on Canadians' trust in different professions conducted in recent years, politicians were always ranked at the bottom. Politicians who crossed the floor in recent years only added fuel to the fire. Even though there has been a slight increase in political engagement in recent elections mainly due to our party, it is not difficult to see that the Canadian political system, in particular the politicians, no longer inspires the confidence of people in general. In the last election, few observers talked about Canadians' interest and engagement in the democratic process and what Canadians think of politics in general.

I will now fill that gap. To shed light on these issues the Association for Canadian Studies commissioned Léger Marketing to ask Canadians a series of questions that offer insight into political interest and engagement. The results show that Canadians have a negative view of politicians and that the vast majority of Canadians do not recommend pursuing a career in politics. Just over one in five do not think that most politicians can be trusted and a similar percentage would recommend a career in politics. In fact, the vast majority would not suggest pursuing such a career.

More specifically, when asked whether most politicians can be trusted, only 3.1% agreed. When asked whether they would recommend that a friend or family member pursue a career in politics, only 4.9% said that they would. The entire system is being called into question. When asked why they think Canadians choose not to vote in elections, most suggest it is the feeling that their vote

has no impact. The second reason offered by Canadians as to why people decide not to vote is that they do not like any of the choices.

With regard to the choices offered, 26.9% of men did not like the choices as compared to 31.3% of women. We should all be wondering why they do not like the choices offered. Something is not working at the political level. In addition, when we look at the figures on politics in general from a language perspective, 40% of francophones did not like politics, as compared to 46% of anglophones and 41% of allophones. It is unbelievable. Voter turnout for Canadian elections is still a major challenge. For the past five elections, the trend has been down: voter turnout was only 61% for the last election.

● (1755)

Canada is now behind countries like Italy, Spain, the Czech Republic and even Greece. Even if we are ahead of the United States, we are still behind Great Britain and New Zealand.

Over the past 30 years, political cynicism has been on the rise in Canada. For example, since 1982, the feeling that honesty and integrity among members of Parliament are weak or very weak increased in 49% of Canadians. In my province, Quebec, according to an article in *La Presse*:

The results [of the survey] show that 87% of respondents chose words like "discouraged" or "put off" to describe how they feel about politics. One in five voters, or 21%, said that they were [completely] indifferent. Only 9% said that they felt optimistic and 11% felt passionate about politics. Among Quebec voters of average age, 34 to 55 years, the proportion of those who felt discouraged or put off by politics climbed to 94%.

When respondents were asked whether they considered themselves to be disillusioned or cynical, 47%, and 50% of women, said that they did, 37% said that they did not and 16% were unsure.

When they were asked why they were so disenchanted, they responded:

Primarily because of integrity. That is the top reason given by 80% of the respondents to explain their disenchantment. Lack of effectiveness came in second, at 72%...Two-thirds of respondents, or 61%, said that "nothing changes in politics". Lastly, 48% said that politicians have a "lack of ideas".

I will go on, because it is important.

Nearly 80% disagree or strongly disagree with the statement that "politicians are honest". Only 14% agree with that statement. Similarly, 88% of respondents disagree with the statement "politicians tell the truth". [Unbelievable.] Only 9% think that politicians tell the truth. It should be noted that no respondents, or 0%, said that they strongly agree with the fact that politicians tell the truth. Some 69% disagree with the statement that "politicians care about the interests of the public". However, nearly half, or 45%, acknowledged that "politicians work hard".

At least we have that.

That is not a pretty picture. A number of articles suggest that the topics Canadians care about most when it comes to trusting politicians is sincerity, honesty, wasting money and lack of public interest.

• (1800)

[English]

This is a situation that should concern us all. In order for a democracy to be healthy and to thrive, it must enjoy the confidence of the vast majority of the electorate. If not, we may very well be headed for a democratic crisis such as exists in the United States, where only 49% of people vote in the federal elections. That is less than half of the eligible voters.

There is a clear need to restore the confidence of Canadians. Cases like those of David Emerson and Belinda Stronach have greatly contributed to weakening Canadians' opinions of our political institutions, but so have consistent governments that have done nothing with regard to political reform.

For example, in 2006, by defeating the bill introduced by my distinguished colleague, Mr. Stoffer, the Liberals, who were in power and were backed by the Bloc Québécois, simply maintained—

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I would like to remind the hon. member that he cannot refer to another member by name.

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: I am sorry. I meant to say “my distinguished colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore.”

[English]

I will resume. The Liberals, who were in power backed by the Bloc Québécois, simply maintained the status quo in 2006. They proved to Canadians that the political class was once again not truly interested in democratic and ethical reforms for Parliament.

We need to give voters in Canada a greater say in the political future of their elected representatives, particularly those who want to cross the floor in order to satisfy their careers.

The point of principle here is this: whose seat is it that we or I am sitting in? This seat is not mine; it is the seat of the people of the Pontiac. I feel very strongly that our political future as MPs must always be decided by our constituents. Only when we stand up on principle and give greater control to the Canadian electorate will some of the cynicism felt by voters in this country fade. It is a fundamental question of accountability to the people we represent. No one should have a problem with that.

Since the NDP introduced the bill in 1997, there has been broad support for it among Canadians. Given the above, this does not surprise me. Ordinary Canadians are tired of the ping-pong game of politics. The reality is that nobody votes for a candidate without considering what party he or she belongs to. It is a true slap in the voter's face when elected representatives join another party without seeking approval from their voters.

Parties are there to present a series of values to Canadians. Election platforms are value statements, and Canadians connect with those values. Canadians know there are differences in values between political parties. They know that the NDP is not the Conservative Party. It is a grave injustice to treat their choices and their political values as though they have no consequence. It is an insult to their intelligence.

Private Members' Business

Honestly, I do not see this as a partisan issue. It is about disciplining us all, on this side of the House and theirs. NDP MPs as much as government MPs would be bound by this legislation.

The government has made a number of proposals with regard to democratic reform. The Conservatives themselves have been concerned about democratic reform ever since they were in opposition. There seems to be an openness by the government with regard to taking action on these matters, but time will show us how serious the government is about reform and about eliminating the backroom dealings that Canadians have come to hate about our political system.

Resistance to this legislation equals resistance to cracking down on backroom deals and secret deals. Fixing Ottawa has to start with ourselves. If the Prime Minister and the government, as well as the other parties represented in the House, are serious about democratic reform, then they should vote for the bill.

• (1805)

[Translation]

This bill aims to discipline us, as representatives of the people, to make us more accountable to the voters' wishes and to cut down on petty politics. It is aimed directly at cynicism.

Many people will undoubtedly ask us, “Why this time? Why now, when it did not work the last time?” When the NDP introduced this bill in 1997, there were 21 NDP members; in 2001, there were 14. We are bringing it back again, now we have more than 100 members, because we believe in it. It is important to us and to Canadians. We are simply continuing what was previously started by the NDP. This is important to us. Today, thanks to Canadians, we are now in a better position, as the official opposition, to get this bill passed.

To conclude, this bill gives us a golden opportunity to show Canadians that we are truly ready to be more responsible and to respect their political choice.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is interesting that the member would propose such a bill. This is a bill that actually passed in the Manitoba legislature.

There were individuals who presented in committee and raised a great deal of concerns. I was told by one individual, and we can do some research to find out if in fact it is the case, that Winston Churchill had crossed the floor on several occasions.

If the issue is to get people engaged and believe in politics, and re-establish this honourable profession as it is, we could probably do more by addressing the whole issue of, for example, negative advertising and the impact that has had. The way in which some campaigns rely on negative advertising in order to capture votes also discourages people from voting.

If we want to get individuals to go out and vote, we have give them a choice. Maybe we could put “none of the above” on the ballots. These are things that would increase the amount of voter participation.

Private Members' Business

My feeling is that, yes, we do need to get more people involved in the process. There are many other things that we could do that would have a very real impact in terms of voter turnout.

I am not too sure, and this is one of the issues that was raised in Manitoba, if this is constitutional. If we have members of Parliament who, in good faith, for whatever reasons, believe they cannot participate or believe it is in their constituents' best interests to take a certain action, like Sir Winston Churchill who many recognize as one of the greatest parliamentarians, do we deny them the opportunity to take an action that they feel is in fact appropriate?

I see them as two different issues, in terms of voter turnout versus something that—

● (1810)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I would like to give the hon. member for Pontiac a chance to respond.

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: Madam Speaker, I am certainly not opposed to some of the suggestions that the member has put forward, with regard to engaging the population.

When it comes to constitutional issues, as the member will know, the bill actually proposes that the individual sit as an independent. So, it directly relates to the role that political parties play in choices during elections. One could question it, but then again, political parties have a particular place in our Canadian democracy. They do represent a certain number of choices, a certain number of values, and those choices should be respected by politicians of all stripes.

[Translation]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Madam Speaker, I very much like the private member's bill introduced by my colleague. Having had a previous life in another party, I feel very comfortable saying that when I decided—completely voluntarily—to join the NDP, I did so by getting elected as a new member of this party. I did not leave in the middle of a term after earning the trust of my constituents under one banner, and then for some reason, no matter how valid, change my mind and cross the floor.

To pick up where the hon. Liberal member left off, what I like about the bill introduced by my colleague from Pontiac is that it does not take away an individual's right to change parties. It simply says that if someone leaves a party, he or she must be re-elected. I wonder if the member for Pontiac could explain this bill a little more—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Pontiac has less than a minute to respond.

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Gatineau for the question.

We are talking about the case of someone who wants to cross the floor during their term. I think it is responsible and reasonable to leave one's party to sit as an independent, and then ask voters to elect that individual in a given political party. There are many good reasons for crossing the floor. We are not attacking the principle. We are attacking the principle of not asking voters to re-elect such individuals when they change their political party.

[English]

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am here

to speak today to Bill C-306, introduced by the member for Pontiac, which addresses changes in the political affiliations of members of Parliament, or more commonly known as floor crossing. The bill would require the resignation of a member of Parliament and a subsequent byelection if the member crosses the floor to sit as a member of a different political party.

While I understand that the goal of this bill would be to ensure that a member's decision to cross the floor is endorsed by a member's constituents, the result of it would be simple. This bill would seriously undermine the independence of members of this House and I do not think that is something we should encourage or support.

This bill would have some practical negative consequences. The bill would impose restrictions upon members who wish to express a different position than the one endorsed by a majority of their caucus. This bill would also impede members of Parliament in representing the interests of their constituents, which is one of the fundamental duties under our Constitution.

I want to briefly go over the details of this bill and then explain in more detail why I believe restrictions on floor crossings would not fit with our Westminster parliamentary system and are inadvisable.

Bill C-306 would require a byelection whenever members join a different registered party than the one that has endorsed them for the previous election or if they were elected as independent candidates during the previous election and subsequently join a political party. However, Bill C-306 would not require a byelection when members leave or are expelled from their caucus to sit as independents, leave their party to form a new party that does not yet have registered party status under the Elections Canada Act or, and I stress, two parties that have registered status under the Elections Canada Act merge. According to the Elections Canada Act, a party obtains registered party status when it endorses at least one candidate for an election, provided it has made the proper application to the Chief Electoral Officer at least 60 days before the issue of writs for that election.

So here are the details. I have some concerns about the technical wording of the bill and not only with its principles. I will speak a bit about the bill's reference to registered parties. Our party system plays a fundamental role in our democracy but, in fact, there are a few statutory provisions regulating the role of political parties in Parliament itself, including the Parliament of Canada Act which Bill C-306 would modify.

In contrast, the roles, rights and obligations of individual members of Parliament are well established in Canada's legislation whereby members of Parliament are central actors in our Westminster system of government. Practically, the caucus system in our Parliament is joined with, but distinct from, the registered party system.

Bill C-306 would go against existing rules and traditions by allowing the party machinery to take precedence over individual rights and responsibilities of each member of Parliament and their caucus choices. This does not correspond to our system of government. As I stated earlier, I believe Bill C-306 would have negative and undesirable consequences on the roles of members of Parliament.

In effect, the bill would require members who fundamentally disagree with their caucus or with the leader of their party to resign their seat or to sit as independents. However, it would blur the line between party membership and caucus membership. Such restrictions would strengthen the control of political parties over individual members by bolstering a party's threat of expulsion in order to maintain party discipline and limit the representative role of members.

Therefore, the bill could discourage elected representatives from expressing their views in caucus debates and encourage party leaders to act without regard to their caucus members' best interests.

We should remember that members of Parliament have three competing but equally important representative roles in Parliament. They are to represent the interests and opinions of their constituents, to present their personal views and judgments, and to support and promote their political parties and party leaders.

By seeking to punish members of Parliament who disagree with their parties so fundamentally that they decide to change their political affiliation, the bill would focus exclusively on the party role of members. This would be detrimental to the individual roles of members, including their duties to act as trustees of the public interest and that of their constituents.

Moreover, the decision to cross the floor cannot be taken lightly. It is an important decision, often with significant consequences.

• (1815)

Of the six members who have crossed the floor since the 2004 election, only one has managed to be re-elected in a subsequent election as an independent candidate. The same premise applies to members of Parliament who have decided to leave or who were expelled from their caucus to sit as independent members. Of the six members who left their caucus to sit as independent members since the 2004 election, only one was re-elected in a subsequent election. What does this mean?

Members are subject to scrutiny by the public, by the media, by parliamentary colleagues, and most importantly, by their voters, their constituents back at home in the next general election. Therefore, I believe this bill is unnecessary as it is that court of opinion by which members are truly judged. To emphasize, general elections themselves are the appropriate mechanism to hold members of Parliament accountable for their actions.

According to the Library of Parliament, there have been approximately 194 floor crossings since Confederation. The floor crossing tradition reflects the importance of preserving the independence and mobility of members of Parliament to vote with their feet when they feel it is in the best interests of their constituents or the country to do so.

Private Members' Business

None of our provinces require a by-election when a member of their legislative assembly changes political affiliations, although Manitoba requires members who leave their caucus to sit as independent members until the end of their terms. Moreover, crossing the floor exists in other Westminster parliamentary systems. The United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand do not currently impose restrictions on floor crossings.

When New Zealand went through a transition period from the first past the post electoral system to a mixed member proportional system, it had passed legislation to prevent floor crossings as a temporary measure in 2001. However, it did not renew these provisions after the 2005 election as they turned out to be ineffective.

This is consistent with the fact that laws banning floor crossing are rare in established democracies, but common in nascent democracies where they are defended as temporary measures designed to consolidate a parliamentary system. We are certainly not in that position here in Canada, nor are our peer countries. I simply cannot see the need for the provisions of this bill.

In conclusion, party affiliation is certainly an important factor when Canadians cast their vote, but they also expect elected representatives to act according to their convictions when they represent local interests at the national level. Ultimately, members are held accountable by their constituents at the next election. Therefore, I encourage all members to oppose Bill C-306

• (1820)

[Translation]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my remarks will not take very long. It is late. I would like to tell the hon. member that his bill is based on good intentions. However, there is a principle that we do not create laws unless it is necessary to do so. In this case, I do not feel that it is necessary. I have sat in this House since 1996 and only once did it not seem legitimate to me when a member crossed the floor.

[English]

However, we do not enact a new law for one case. Mr. David Emerson, a couple days after the election, crossed the floor to be appointed minister. That was unacceptable as he campaigned against the Conservative Party, but a few days later became a minister. If this were a pattern, of course, I would agree to do something, but it is an exception.

[Translation]

In the other cases that I have seen, the members who changed parties had legitimate reasons for doing so. For example, when Jean Charest gave up the leadership of the Conservative Party to become the leader of the Liberal Party in Quebec, the Conservative Party really changed. Many Quebec members were no longer part of the new party because the leader had changed and their constituents asked them why they did not join the Liberals. So, they came to us. When election time came six months later, they were all re-elected. The voters followed them. Had they been obliged to resign and had they been prevented from doing their work in their ridings for six to eight months, what purpose would that have served? They told me they were hopeful that their voters would follow them when they made that change.

Private Members' Business

All hon. members who have switched parties more or less justify their decision that way. They feel that they did not change, but their party did and that they were elected for certain commitments that the party has not respected. They were no longer comfortable in their party and they switched. It does not happen very often, but it does happen from time to time. Every time it happens—and I do not necessarily approve of the change when it is Liberals who leave to join another party—I am not happy about it, but I cannot deny the legitimacy of the decision. As the hon. member was saying earlier, if voters do not follow them, they will not be re-elected. They will be treated as turncoats and they will be defeated. That is how the system works. I do not see the need to change it when we do not have the necessary justification for unduly strengthening the parties with respect to the free choice of the hon. members of this House, who, for personal reasons, might want, quite legitimately, to change their allegiance.

My colleague mentioned other parliaments earlier. The parliamentarian who quite possibly is the most respected in the history of democracy, who not only saved a country, but a civilization, is Winston Churchill. If ever there was a parliamentarian who switched parties often, it was Winston Churchill. Thus, under certain circumstances I think it is legitimate to switch parties. That being said, I am a Liberal and I will always be a Liberal.

• (1825)

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am completely shocked. I thought the Conservatives were a party of democracy, as were the Liberals. I did not know that even though my name is on the seat here it is not my seat. I do not own this seat. It does not belong to me. It does not belong to my party. It belongs to the 91,000 people I represent in Sackville—Eastern Shore.

I was elected as a New Democratic member of Parliament. However, if in an hour I called the leader of the Liberal Party or maybe the Prime Minister and asked if they wanted me, I could be a Conservative member of Parliament or a Liberal member of Parliament in an hour or even less than that.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Not a chance.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: I was not elected as a Conservative, a Liberal or a Green member. I was elected as a New Democratic member of Parliament.

If, for whatever reason, I could no longer sit as a New Democratic member of Parliament, either I was being a real rabble-rouser and the party members said that I was being a major pain in the buttocks and that I could not be here any more, or I could no longer live by the philosophy, I would have several solutions to my problem. I could sit as an independent until the next election and make my choice known or I could quit. The premise then would be to seek the nomination of the new party, fly under its flag and seek election under that banner.

It is the people who decide our fate. There is nothing worse than sitting in the House of Commons listening to a new member of Parliament, for whom I have great respect, read bureaucratic notes that are handed to her. Does she not remember what the Prime Minister said when the former member for Kings—Hants joined the

Liberal Party and became a cabinet minister. He said that any person who crosses the floor for a few pieces of silver has more or less sold their soul. He was very angry that it happened.

I remember when the great Belinda Stronach left the Conservatives and went over to the Liberal Party. Not one Conservative said that it was a wonderful thing she did. Not one Conservative sent her flowers and said, “Good for you, Belinda, that was great. You exercised your member of Parliament’s duty”. No. What they said was very vile. What they said was extremely rude because she was a woman and she was well-known in this country. However, the comments from the Conservative members of Parliament and the Alberta Conservative members of Parliament were beyond the pale. Besides the tone of those comments, they were justified in their anger because a person left the party to sit as a cabinet minister in another party.

I will use the great David Emerson as an example. The beauty of being here for a while is that we get to remember some of these things. David Emerson was a minister in the Liberal government. There was an election in 2006 and the Conservatives won the election.

In February 2006, the cabinet of the Conservative Party was sworn in, and rightfully so, and the beauty of our democracy is that not a shot was fired. However, an hour before the Conservatives took over the government, the former member for Vancouver Kingsway, who was a Liberal cabinet minister when Paul Martin signed off, was sworn in as a Conservative cabinet minister with a better pension, better pay and a car. That was a Liberal cabinet minister who had said that he would be the Conservatives’ worst nightmare, and it turned into a dream for him.

Would David Emerson have crossed the floor if he were to sit in the backbench with no critic area or anything? I do not think so.

The reality is that this is not my seat. It belongs to the people of Canada in my riding.

I cannot thank my hon. colleague for Pontiac enough. For the Liberals to stand up and say that they do not like this, they should get real. If we do not start disciplining ourselves, more and more people will not go to the polls. Canadians are telling us that they do not like the fact that we are entitled to our entitlements. The last thing members of Parliament should do is Dingwall the Canadian people. We should stop that.

• (1830)

If a member wishes, for whatever reason, to join another political party while sitting as an elected member of Parliament of a current party, it is quite simple: the member should sit as an independent until the next election, or quit, seek a byelection and explain to his or her constituents why he or she now needs to have another flag over his or her home. That is constitutional responsibility, and that is being true to democracy and to one’s constituents.

The Conservative member spoke with bureaucratic notes without really thinking. There are four reasons that members get elected: first, to throw burns out; second, for their leader; third, for their party; and fourth, for themselves. In most cases, being oneself is the last reason people vote for a person.

The member talked about giving too much party discipline to the leader and the party. I remember a certain Conservative defence minister from Central Nova who said, "We don't kick people out of our party for voting against the budget or voting against the wishes of their constituents". Guess what? Bill Casey, the former member for Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, voted against the Conservative budget because of the Atlantic accord and, before that man sat his derrière on the seat, he was out of the party. He was gone.

The Conservatives exercised discipline because they triple whipped the vote. We understand that parties do that time and again, but we cannot have a senior minister, who joined the Conservative Party, say publicly in the House of Commons, "We don't kick people out for voting against us and doing what they wish", and then, before the member could sit down, kicked him out. That is party discipline. We understand party discipline. It happens. It is what all members of Parliament need to understand when this happens. If members take chances, they take the consequences.

We have a party system but, and I am talking about the ladies and gentlemen across the way, how many of them would have gotten elected as independents? I ask them to put up their hands right now if they could have been elected as an independent in the House of Commons. I do not see any hands going up. The reality is that it does not happen. It is rare that it happens.

Therefore, we should stop abusing the trust of our constituents. Our constituents are the ones who put us here. We tell our constituents which political banner we are being elected under. For whatever reason, it happens all the time. There are legitimate reasons for members to leave their parties. I will bet that members who are here long enough may think maybe it should. However, the reality is that members have a couple of beverages, forget about it and move on.

The truth is that we should never abuse our constituents. This bill would enact more discipline among ourselves and, more important, it is a private member's bill. We would hope that the Conservatives and the Liberals would enact a free vote on this measure, get it to committee and have Democracy Watch and others from across the country attend. I can honestly say that I have been working on this legislation since 1999 and the overwhelming majority of people I have spoken to, not just New Democrats but a lot of Conservatives, Liberals, the Green Party and former Bloc members are fully supportive of this legislation.

They do not want us treating the House of Commons as the no tell motel, where people check in under an assumed name. This carpet is very expensive. We cannot just keep tramping back and forth when we want to. We need to have respect for the institution, but, most important, we need to have respect for our constituents.

This is what this bill is all about and I am very proud of my hon. colleague from Pontiac for introducing this legislation once again. All the Conservatives and Liberals should send ten percenters or householders into their ridings and ask their constituents about floor crossing. They would be surprised at the answers, because I have already done that and I know the answer. The overwhelming majority of Canadians want us to stop that practice, stop the entitlement of entitlements, behave ourselves, be more responsible

and understand that the seats do not belong to us. They belong to the people of Canada.

• (1835)

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Madam Speaker, this is the time of the year that the seasons change with Halloween, the geese fly south and for 30 days the moustache of the hon. member for Sackville—Eastern Shore disappears before it makes its annual return to our chamber.

I want to take this opportunity to address the bill. I think it is an unwise bill. It is problematic on a technical level and I will explain what that is very briefly. However, even if it worked, which I do not think it would, it would do something that is not in the public interest, and that is to establish greater control for the party leadership in each of the parties, not just the governing party but all the parties, over the individual member, something which, frankly, there is too much right now. In fact, that was a fair part of the substance of the member's speech.

I will read one of the four sections by which it would amend the Parliament of Canada Act. The bill states:

Any person holding a seat in the House of Commons who becomes a member of a registered party as defined in subsection 2(1) of the Canada Elections Act is deemed to have vacated the seat and ceases to be a member of the House if, in the last election, the person was endorsed by another registered party or was not endorsed by a registered party.

In other words the member is an independent. It is trying to say that if I were elected as a Conservative in my riding and I crossed the floor to the New Democrats, I would cease to be a member and there would be a byelection. It does not actually achieve that goal because I could just as well sit with the New Democrats as a member of the caucus without being an actual card carrying member of the New Democratic Party. It may very well be that the New Democrats would not accept me, but I am assuming if they were willing to accept me on those terms, this whole process would be obviated. There have been many examples, both of opposition parties and of governments which have functioned with members of multiple parties.

The actual goal of the bill will not be achieved even if it is passed. Quite frankly, that is a good thing because the bill is a bad bill. It is a bad idea and it was a bad idea when it was proposed by a New Democratic member a couple of Parliaments ago. I spoke to it then. It was a bad idea when it was proposed by a Conservative member a few Parliaments ago, when I spoke against it and voted against it as well.

It is not because these are bad members or members who are lacking in goodwill, but because anything that establishes further control for the reasons that my hon. colleague from Calgary spelled out in her speech and anything that creates greater control for the party leadership over the individual MPs is a bad thing.

Private Members' Business

I am not alone in thinking this. As my colleague from Calgary mentioned, there have been 194 floor crossings at the federal level and many more at the provincial level since the time of Confederation. The Library of Parliament apparently did that research, but there have been so many floor crossings that there is actually a Wikipedia article about Canadian floor crossings. I asked one of the researchers to print the pages that dealt with floor crossings since I became a MP in the year 2000.

It is interesting to look at what happened to people who tried crossing the floor. Some of them were defeated in the next election, indicating that their voters did not like what they did. Others were re-elected, some of them many times. I will read some of the names and members will see my point.

In September 2000, just before I first ran and was elected, David Price, Diane St-Jacques and André Harvey all left the Progressive Conservative Party caucus and joined the Liberals. At least two of those were re-elected successfully in the next election.

Rick Laliberte, a New Democrat, left the NDP to join the Liberals at that time as well.

In 2001 there was rebellion against Stockwell Day, the leader of my party at that time. I was a member of the Canadian Alliance and a number of members rebelled against his leadership and sat as the Democratic Representative caucus, a separate group which had not previously existed. Whether that would violate the terms of this act, I do not know, but they sat separately: Art Hanger, Chuck Strahl, Gary Lunn, Jim Pankiw, Val Meredith, Grant McNally, Jay Hill, Jim Gouk, Monte Solberg, Andy Burton, Brian Fitzpatrick, Deborah Grey and Inky Mark all did that. Most but not all of them returned to the new Conservative Party caucus once the new Conservative Party had been created.

● (1840)

Others of us did not go through that process, but we did enter that Parliament as Canadian Alliance Canada and left as Conservatives after the creation of the new Conservative Party, or as Progressive Conservatives, and left as Conservatives. Those were all legitimate changes.

Would they fall afoul of this bill? I do not know, but they were legitimate changes. I can say for myself, I was re-elected with a much more substantial margin following that election. Was it because people liked me more? Was it because they liked the new party more? Was it because they liked the new leader more? I am not sure. It was some combination I suppose, but the point is in the end that choice was validated by my voters.

Continuing along down here, in 2002, this was while the Canadian Alliance was still in existence, before the merger of the CA and PC, Joe Peschisolidi, a Canadian Alliance MP, left to join the Liberals. He was defeated in a subsequent election.

In 2003, in the course of the merger negotiations between the PCs and the CA, the member for Kings—Hants left the PCs, just as the new Conservative Party was to be created, to sit as a Liberal, ran, and has been successfully re-elected several times.

That was also what Keith Martin did. He was re-elected twice, or maybe three times after that as a Liberal, and chose not to run in the recent election.

About the same time, a year later, John Bryden, a Liberal MP, stepped down. He sat as an independent first, joined the Conservative Party, and then was defeated in the nomination battle for the Conservative Party, so we never got the chance to see what the voters thought of his proposal.

David Kilgour sat for many years as a Liberal. He had been elected as a Progressive Conservative and chose to cross the floor prior to the 1993 election. He was then re-elected, served as a Liberal, and in fact became a cabinet minister for the Liberals. Clearly, the voters were willing to accept what he did.

Belinda Stronach, of course, left the Conservatives after having sought its leadership. She sat as a Liberal and was re-elected as a Liberal, so voters agreed with that.

Wajid Khan tried leaving the Liberals to join the Conservatives in 2007. He was defeated in the subsequent election. Voters were not willing to accept that.

Blair Wilson ran as a Liberal, was essentially pushed out of his party, and then sat as the first Green Party MP. He was then defeated in the next election, so his voters were not willing to accept that.

As we can see, there is a wide range of people who have done this, and there has been a wide range of voter reactions. The general reaction has not been to say, "We absolutely reject what these MPs have done". Absolutely not. There has, in fact, been a considerable acceptance when the circumstances seemed legitimate.

I want to make a further point about this. There have been some quite well-known people who have made multiple floor crossing changes. Someone earlier mentioned Winston Churchill. Here is what Winston Churchill did. He was elected in 1901 as a Conservative in England. In 1904, he crossed the floor to the Liberals and served in their cabinet. This rankled the Conservatives so much that in 1915, during the first world war, when the Conservatives joined with the Liberal party to form a coalition government, they demanded that he be demoted as a condition of joining a coalition government, in the time of war, so this really bothered them a lot.

However, as it turned out, his voters thought it was okay and he continued to be re-elected and served until 1924 as a Liberal MP. He was then defeated, spent some time, about a year, as a private citizen, then came back in as a Conservative again. He made the observation, because some people did not approve of this sort of thing, by saying, "Anyone can rat, but it takes a certain amount of ingenuity to re-rat".

He then went on and served his country, admirably of course, as prime minister. He did save western civilization, so he could not have been all bad. He did so, I should point out, as head of a coalition government. Effectively, he was not a Conservative while he was doing that. He served as prime minister the second time as a Conservative. He served, really, in three different parties. He served as prime minister in two different parties. Clearly, these things are permissible in certain circumstances.

I have a final note, because I know I am just about out of time. My former colleague, Inky Mark, was one of those who was a floor crosser to the Democratic Reform caucus. Here is his history, party wise. He was elected as a Reformer, served as a Canadian Alliance MP when the party changed, then served in the Democratic Reform caucus, then served as a Progressive Conservative, then served in the Conservative Party of Canada. His voters re-elected him over and over again.

Clearly, this is an acceptable practice and I do not think we should make it illegal.

• (1845)

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to stand in support of the Bill C-306 submitted by my colleague from Pontiac. I was here for some of the time that the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore gave some examples. I always find it interesting to listen to the comments from the member for Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington. Once again, I do not agree. We usually do not agree, but we do enjoy the give and take. As often as I can, I say I have a great deal of respect for the member, but I disagree with him again.

I will deal with the core piece because I will not have a chance to deal with all of it.

At first blush, one aspect citizens think about when they want to choose their member of Parliament, whether it is in the legislature or in the House of Commons, is the candidate. I thought the point was well-taken that an awful lot of us believe we are the only ones who could get here on our own. We do not need anybody or party because they are a big problem more than they are a help. The reality is that most members do not get elected on their own name, recognition and reputation alone.

A lot of people, especially these days, do not have a particular allegiance to a political party. Rather they take it issue by issue, election by election. They will see what the issues are and the ones that affect them the most, determine how they feel about them and that often drives their decision, recognizing that citizens have the right to base their decision on anything they choose. That is one of the beauties of democracy and freedom.

Certainly a lot of people look at what the parties are offering. They might not even know the candidates or they do not care about the party label. Rather they care about one issue, they find the party that is closest to their heart on that issue and that is where they mark their ballots. That is fair enough.

Some folks have great allegiance to a political party. All members of all parties have active members in their riding associations. These are people who, with some exceptions, will likely vote for the candidate no matter who it is. They will vote for the candidate no matter what the platform is because they support the party.

All of that is entirely legitimate and acceptable.

Those people who vote for the candidates probably do not care much as to whether they are independents, or members of the parties they have run for, or have crossed the floor, or have re-rat, which has been brought back from history as former Prime Minister Churchill

had said, and I am glad that is in there, or have re-rat over and over again. They really do not care.

However, those people who vote on platform or party are often devastated when the person they voted for crosses the floor. They told their friends to vote for that candidate. They put signs on the their front lawns in support of the candidate. They took all the heat from others who did not vote for that candidate during the election. They told people that was their candidate because of the platform or the party. Their whole reason for voting for that candidate is negated.

It is not a small matter. When I have stood for election for the four parliaments I have been elected to, I have stood on my own reputation and I am accountable for the decisions and the actions I have taken. However, make no mistake, in my riding a lot of my constituents voted for me because they liked our platform. As long as there was a candidate who would support the platform, they would be with that person. It is likewise for the party.

If we accept that is a legitimate, rationale, understandable and important reason for people to think about voting for a candidate, the platform or the party, if one then bails out, as did Mr. Emerson, which is the richest example, and I do not like to personalize, it takes one's breath away.

• (1850)

I do not think the writs were even returned. The ink was hardly dry on the ballots, and this man was already trotting across the floor to join another party. He believed that was the right thing to do, for him, but what about all those constituents who had a reason to believe that once elected, the member would actually go about enacting the platform and policies of the party that member belonged to?

By crossing the floor, in many cases a member is throwing away what he or she believed in to join a party that is 180 degrees in the other direction. How do we think constituents feel? They would sit there wondering what happened. Constituents went out and voted in good faith, as did all their friends, and they expected that the money they donated to that campaign and the sign that they posted were all to help get enough seats on a particular platform so that the way the constituent would have liked to have seen Canada shaped on a particular issue would have actually happened. Now that would be gone, because the member could just cross the floor in order to remain a cabinet minister. It really is problematic.

I have great respect for the other views. It is never easy to change things around here, and for good reason. We do not want to rush to change, but by the same token, we cannot be afraid of change. This is an evolving place, and the way we do business here does evolve.

It would seem to me that it is an appropriate restriction on members when they get to this place. Just as members cannot break the rules of the code of conduct or break the rules of the House—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member will have three minutes when this bill returns on the order paper.

[Translation]

The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

*Adjournment Proceedings***ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS**

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[Translation]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Madam Speaker, the situation is simple. I am a member of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. That committee has met a number of times, at first to discuss the Auditor General's reports, which the previous committee had begun to consider.

It is important that we reopen those studies. Fourteen of the Auditor General's chapters remain on hold. Seven of those chapters simply needed to be tabled by the committee in order to get a government response. Three other chapters simply needed to be adopted by the committee. The reports had been adopted by the committee and referred by the committee for a government response, but, for three of them, the committee still had work to do.

We moved a motion. We made it public even before the committee meeting began. The government decided the meeting would be held in camera. That is why we moved our motion in public. We also managed to talk about it a bit at the beginning.

I would like to specify, and this has been reported in the media, that the hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie, a member of the committee, said outside the closed doors that, with this election, much has changed.

• (1855)

[English]

He said that with this election, much has changed.

[Translation]

He also mentioned that he wanted to start again with a fresh slate.

[English]

He also mentioned that he wanted to "start with a fresh slate".

[Translation]

I want to point out that, in these reports, the Auditor General raised some very important points, notably the massive cost overruns in the purchase of military helicopters, the poor management of parliamentary building repairs and, a hot topic at the time, the charges against the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner.

So, we introduced this motion. Then we went to an in camera session. I obviously cannot repeat what was said, but I can say that the motion was not passed. It is not in the minutes. If it had passed, it would be there.

I would like to point out that this is a question of transparency and accountability, and we are sorry that the committee decided to meet in camera. We voted against that. As I said, this question is fundamental to transparency and accountability.

We received a comment from a voter in Ottawa, Andrew MacLeod, who spoke out against these actions. I would like to read what he wrote:

[English]

I would like to register my disappointment and anger at your recent [decision] to go in camera and shelve a number of reports from the Auditor General's office. This is particularly disappointing given that the Conservative government came into power in 2006 upon a platform of transparency and accountability. I believed it then, which is why I was ready to vote Conservative at that time. However, here we are five years later, and it's apparent that you learned nothing from the experiences of the previous Liberal government.

It may be within your rights—

—he is still addressing Conservative members—

—as a committee to decide not to study these reports and to decide that the public should not know about their contents. But it is not right. We, as Canadian citizens, send you to Ottawa to make decisions for us and to spend our money wisely. We do not send you there to recklessly fritter away our hard-earned tax dollars—

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I will give the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board an opportunity to reply.

[English]

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Madam Speaker, I remind my colleague that we did not cause the spring 2011 election. It was the opposition parties that did. It was his party that did.

Our government wanted, at the time and to this day, to work hard for Canadians, not as the NDP continues to do in striving every day to advance endless cheap political games.

Last spring the NDP caused the election, which ground to a halt all of the work that was under way in Parliament, and that set us back. Right now in the public accounts committee, we are in the midst of a study into the spring 2011 Auditor General's report; in a few weeks, we will have to study the fall 2011 Auditor General's report. We have public accounts to study in a couple of weeks as well, and untold other business until the winter constituency break.

The public accounts committee, as well as others, was in the midst of or had completed studies on matters related to that Parliament, the previous Parliament, the 40th Parliament. With the election, much changed.

I congratulate the new chair of the public accounts committee as the first NDP chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. I look across the way during committee to see several newly elected MPs on our side too. I do not think anyone would suggest that the current position of Parliament reflects the Parliament before the spring election.

I know it is difficult to believe, but we are now at the beginning of November. That gives us just over one month to address a lot of new material, so I just do not know how that member or his party could propose taking on all the work from the last Parliament as well. Where does it stop? With this new Parliament, should we revisit studies from the 39th Parliament as well?

It is unfortunate but true that the spring 2011 election set us back. I, along with the government members of the committee, cannot simply rubber-stamp reports from the last Parliament. That is not fair to the subject matter and it is not fair to the new members on our committee.

While I think it is unfortunate, and I remind the members that this situation was not the government's doing, I do not believe we can begin to look backward when we have so much work ahead of us.

● (1900)

[Translation]

Mr. Guy Caron: Madam Speaker, I listened carefully to my colleague. I would like to point out that Parliament was adjourned and the work interrupted because of a motion of contempt, a first in Canadian history. The fact that we have a new Parliament does not mean that the chapters of the Auditor General's reports are no longer pertinent.

It is not as much work as he claims. The government will be asked to provide a response to only seven chapters. That will take five minutes. The reports on the other three chapters to be studied must be approved by the committee and returned to Parliament. We are talking about a half hour's work approximately. Three reports, including the one on the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner, remain to be studied.

The fact that there is a new government does not make the problems go away. The problems identified by the Auditor General must be dealt with and that is why we raised the issue. If we want the Canadian public to have confidence in its institutions, these decisions should at least have been made in public and not behind closed doors.

[English]

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Madam Speaker, it is not fair to force new MPs to deal with reports of previous committees when they were not even around at the time. They did not even have the benefit of hearing witnesses, nor of discussing these reports in committee. These are simply not their reports.

We have a lot of work ahead of us, with new reports and new witnesses. We need to get going right away on these new reports to get work done for Canadians.

G8 SUMMIT

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise again in this chamber to raise an issue that is very important to my riding and to accountability in this country. This regards the current President of the Treasury Board, the member for Parry Sound—Muskoka, and the misallocation of nearly \$50 million of border infrastructure funds. These funds did not go into ridings like mine, where there is a significant thickening of the Canada-U.S. border which affects our economy, tourism and a whole series of very important things.

When I asked my question, the President of the Treasury Board's assistant got up to answer, as he has done so many times in the House of Commons. He gave a rebuttal but he did not expand on why there was no accountability. This is very important as we are talking about \$50 million.

Adjournment Proceedings

I have a couple of examples of critical things which took place while the President of the Treasury Board was spending \$50 million on glow sticks, gazebos, arenas, a fake lake, different projects that really were not appropriate for the G8 and G20.

In Windsor, the federal government closed the administration and decision-making component of our customs and border facility for a few million dollars. Agents in Windsor have to communicate with an office 400 kilometres away, in Fort Erie. This is despite a government report that said if there was going to be consolidation of the Fort Erie, Niagara Falls and Windsor areas, it should be situated in Windsor because it is the busiest international border crossing between Canada and the United States. It is one of the busiest in the world. Agents are dealing with drug busts. They are dealing with issues regarding immigrants coming into Canada illegally. They are dealing with all kinds of problems on a daily basis. They now have to radio an office 400 kilometres away to get someone to make a decision about apprehending individuals.

The Conservatives often talk about being tough on crime. All kinds of handguns are getting into Canada through the U.S. border and it is unacceptable. It increases crime and tragedy in Canada.

Meanwhile, \$50 million was being spent 650 kilometres away from the Windsor-Detroit border on gazebos, fake lakes and a series of pet projects. At the same time the government was cancelling and closing the administration and supervisory capacity at the busiest border crossing, the Windsor-Detroit crossing. That is just not acceptable. We want answers.

If the government has money to allocate for those things, then surely it has enough money to protect the streets of Windsor and Essex County all the way along the 400-series highways to Toronto, Montreal and Quebec City. It does not make any sense to cut a few million dollars out of the budget and move operations 400 kilometres away just because the Conservatives had pet pork-barrel projects 650 kilometres in the other direction.

It is very important to recognize that these ideological cuts by the Conservatives are because they want to cut the department by 5% through attrition. The decision is not based on need or fact. In fact, that decision is counter to reports the government made.

I would like to have an answer as to why the government would redirect money from border infrastructure and border support systems to Muskoka. The money should have been put into Windsor to protect the streets of Ontario.

Adjournment Proceedings

• (1905)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Madam Speaker, there were no funds redirected from border security to the G8 fund. In fact, there was a top-up that was authorized by the House of Commons to the border infrastructure fund that ensured any dollars spent would not come out of existing allocations for border security. That should put the hon. member's mind at ease as a representative for the Windsor border region.

On the broader question of the G8 fund, it is clear that the House of Commons should have been made more aware of the details of the authorization that it voted for in the estimates leading up to the projects that were funded. That mistake was pointed out by the Auditor General. The government acknowledged it and has pledged to fix it for future allocations and expenditures.

The good news is that of the 32 projects identified and approved by Infrastructure Canada, all of them either came in on or under budget. We know where every single penny went. If members of the public want to know how those dollars were spent, they can go to the Infrastructure Canada website where everything is publicly listed.

The outcome is that we know where the money went. We know what it was spent on, and it all came in under budget.

Mr. Brian Masse: Madam Speaker, what it really boils down to is for Canadians to figure out that \$50 million went to gazebos, fake

lakes, and a series of projects that were supposed to be border funds. Perhaps the cut I am talking about in particular here was not a border infrastructure fund but surely the government could have reallocated those moneys for those operations when it was seeking to cut the Windsor decision-making process that keeps guns, drugs and illegal immigrants off the streets of Canada, but it did not do that. We would have had that money easily available for 50 years if it were not misappropriated.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Madam Speaker, once again, the funds were not redirected away from any border security initiative. They were authorized as additional or supplementary funds that allowed the projects to occur without diverting resources away from the important priorities, such as border security, with which the hon. member is so legitimately preoccupied.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Cape Breton—Canso is not present to raise the matter for which adjournment notice has been given. Accordingly the notice is deemed withdrawn.

• (1910)

[Translation]

The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:10 p.m.)

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HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 146 • NUMBER 043 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, November 3, 2011

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

CONTENTS

(Table of Contents appears at back of this issue.)

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, November 3, 2011

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1005)

[Translation]

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS OF CANADA

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to table today, in both official languages, the 2011 public accounts of Canada. The Government of Canada committed to strictly managing our financial resources and to showing more accountability and transparency in our reports. For the 13th consecutive year, the government has received an unqualified audit opinion from the Auditor General of Canada on the financial statements. The Government of Canada has every reason to be proud of this.

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES (B), 2011-12

A message from His Excellency the Governor General transmitting supplementary estimates (B) for the financial year ending March 31, 2012, was presented by the President of the Treasury Board and read by the Speaker to the House.

[English]

MEMBERS' EXPENDITURES

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table a document entitled "Individual Member's Expenditures for the Fiscal Year Ended March 31, 2011".

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to three petitions.

CERTIFICATES OF NOMINATION

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts in regard to the certificate of nomination of Michael Ferguson to the position of Auditor General of Canada.

CELL PHONE FREEDOM ACT

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-343, An Act respecting the locking of cellular telephones.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure today to introduce a private member's bill, the cellphone freedom bill. The bill takes an important step, providing more consumer choice and promoting competition in the domestic wireless market. It would do that by striking a healthy balance on the issue of mobile phone network locks.

Network locks means that Canadian consumers' cellphones are locked to work only on the network of the carrier from which they buy their phone. The cellphone freedom act would level the playing field for Canadian cellphone customers. It would mandate that consumers buying new cellphones in Canada must be informed of any cell network lock on their phones before sale. It would require phone companies to unlock handsets upon request, without charge, when consumers purchase new phones outright. It says that carriers must unlock handsets upon request, free of charge again, when a consumer comes to the end of his or her service contract, or any time thereafter.

I invite members of all parties to stand up for competition and consumers and support the cellphone freedom bill.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

• (1010)

AUDITOR GENERAL OF CANADA

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC) moved:

That, in accordance with subsection 3(1) of the Auditor General Act, R.S.C. 1985, c. A-17, and pursuant to Standing Order 111.1, this House approve the appointment of Michael Ferguson as Auditor General of Canada for a term of 10 years.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Government Orders

The Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Speaker: Call in the members.

● (1050)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 51)

YEAS

Members

Abлонczy
Adler
Albas
Alexander
Alison
Ambrose
Anderson
Aspin
Batemian
Bezan
Block
Braid
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)
Burt
Calkins
Carmichael
Chisu
Clarke
Daniel
Dechert
Devolin
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Fantino
Fletcher
Gallant
Glover
Golding
Gosal
Grewal
Hawn
Hiebert
Hieback
Holder
Jean
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kent
Komarnicki
Lake
Lee
Lemieux
Lizon
Lukiwski
MacKay (Central Nova)
Mayes
McLeod
Merrifield
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Nicholson
O'Connor
Oda
Paradis
Penashue
Preston

Adams
Agiukkaq
Albrecht
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Ambler
Anders
Armstrong
Baird
Benoit
Blaney
Boughen
Breitkreuz
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Bruinooge
Calandra
Cannan
Carrie
Chong
Clement
Davidson
Del Mastro
Dreessen
Dykstra
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Gaipeau
Gill
Goguen
Goodyear
Gourde
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hayes
Hillyer
Hoepfner
James
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kerr
Krump (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lauzon
Leitch
Leung
Lobb
Lunnery
MacKenzie
McColeman
Menegakis
Miller
Norlock
O'Neill Gordon
Opitz
Payne
Pothier
Raitt

Rajotte
Reid
Richardson
Ritz
Schellenberger
Shca
Smith
Sorenson
Storseth
Sweet
Toet
Trost
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Seebach
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Sopuck
Stanton
Strahl
Tilson
Toews
Trottier
Tweed
Valcourt
Van Loan
Wallace
Warkentin
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Wilks
Wong
Yelich
Young (Vancouver South)

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)
Ashton
Aubin
Bellavance
Beyvington
Blanchette-Lamothe
Borg
Boutin-Sweet
Brossseau
Cash
Chicoine
Christopherson
Comartin
Crowder
Day
Donnelly
Dubé
Dussault
Freeman
Genest
Giguère
Gravelle
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Hughes
Jacob
Kelway
Larose
Laverdière
Leslie
Mai
Martin
Mathysen
Michaud
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Nantel
Nunez-Melo
Patry
Perreault
Quach
Raynault
Saganash
Savoie
Sims (Newton—North Delta)
Stewart
Sullivan
Toonco

Angus
Atamanenko
Ayala
Benskin
Blanchette
Boivin
Boulerice
Bratani
Caron
Charlton
Choquette
Cleary
Côté
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Dionne Labelle
Doré Lefebvre
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Fortin
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Nil

PAIRED

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

PETITIONS

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, petitions continue to pour in from my riding of Hamilton Mountain, all of which address the urgent need for a national pharmacare program in our country. The petitioners point out that our goal ought to be a national drug plan that would enable all Canadians to enjoy equitable access to medicines and at the same time control the rising cost of drugs.

The petitioners are keenly aware of a report released by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, which concluded that the existing patchwork of private and public plans in Canada is inequitable, inefficient and costly. The report found that Canada was the third most expensive country for brand-name drugs because it deliberately inflates drug prices in order to attract pharmaceutical investments.

Instead of tackling the issue head-on, the government is talking about privatization and user fees. Those are hardly the answers for an aging population that is already finding it difficult to make ends meet and whose retirement savings are again put at risk by yet another economic downturn.

The request by the petitioners is as straightforward as it is urgent. They simply want the government to acknowledge that there is a sound economic case to be made for universal public medicare and to get on with the job of developing and implementing a national pharmacare program.

While I know that the rules of the House do not allow me to endorse a petition, I will conclude by commending the Congress of Union Retirees of Canada for its timely leadership on this important issue.

The Speaker: I would just remind hon. members that the Standing Orders provide for a succinct explanation of the petition and I urge members to stick to that so we can accommodate more members who wish to present petitions.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North.

VISITOR VISAS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to present a petition today on behalf of individuals who have growing concerns regarding the number of visas that are being rejected. Quite often parents and close family members are attempting to come to Canada to participate in weddings and many other celebrations. However, too many visas are being denied.

The idea of multi-year, multi-entry visas is something that needs to be acted on. We know that it is there in principle, but it does need to be acted on.

The petitioners are asking the government to give special consideration to family members.

• (1055)

ASBESTOS

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to present a petition signed by literally thousands of Canadians

Government Orders

who are calling upon Parliament to take note that asbestos is the greatest industrial killer the world has ever known.

The petitioners point out that more Canadians now die from asbestos than all other industrial causes combined, and yet Canada remains one of the largest producers and exporters of asbestos in the world, spending millions of dollars subsidizing the asbestos industry and blocking international efforts to curb its use.

The petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to ban asbestos in all of its forms and institute a just transition program for asbestos workers and the communities in which they live. They also call upon the government to end all government subsidies of asbestos in Canada and abroad, and to stop blocking international health and safety conventions designed to protect workers from asbestos, such as the Rotterdam convention.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present a petition signed by Nova Scotians who are concerned about the fate of Mr. Philip Halliday. Mr. Halliday, a resident of Digby, has languished in a Spanish prison for 22 months without even having a trial date set. Friends and family will hold a rally in support of Mr. Halliday tomorrow and a strong turnout is expected. They have the same hope as the people who signed this petition.

The petitioners call upon the government to defend the rights of Mr. Halliday and take action to intervene on his behalf with the Spanish authorities.

The petitioners also call upon the Government of Canada to use diplomatic channels to ensure Mr. Halliday receives a fair and speedy trial, or immediate release based upon the length of his detention with no trial date and his continued deteriorating health issues.

SEARCH AND RESCUE

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition on behalf of a number of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and also residents of other parts of Atlantic Canada calling on the government to reverse its decision to close the marine rescue coordinating centre in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador.

The petitioners point out that the rescue centre staff have a unique knowledge of the area, the ocean and the coastline. They are responsible for an area of 900,000 square kilometres. This rescue coordinating centre has the highest proportion of distress incidents in Canada and saves the lives of 600 people in distress each year.

The petitioners call upon the government to reverse its decision and to reinstate and keep the marine rescue coordinating centre in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador. They are concerned that its closure will mean services will suffer and lives will be put at risk.

Government Orders

This is a very important issue in my province of Newfoundland and Labrador. The knowledge of the people at sea and the Coast Guard auxiliary that is available are very important to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Question No. 151 will be answered today.

[Text]

Question No. 151—Hon. John McCallum:

With regard to Infrastructure Canada, what was the estimate, prepared for the seventh report to Canadians, of the number of Economic Action Plan projects and the value of the federal contribution that would be affected by the government's December 2, 2010, decision to extend the stimulus construction deadline?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as part of Canada's economic action plan, Infrastructure Canada is responsible for delivering the \$4 billion infrastructure stimulus fund and the \$500 million top-up to the communities component of the building Canada fund. These two programs benefited from the government's decision to extend the stimulus construction deadline from March 31, 2011, to October 31, 2011. Two additional programs not managed by Infrastructure Canada, the knowledge infrastructure program and recreational infrastructure Canada, also benefited from the extension.

Although the seventh report to Canadians was released on January 31, 2011, it was finalized ahead of this date. At the time the report was finalized, provinces, territories, municipalities, and other partners had not yet submitted, as per the conditions of the extension, their requests for extending their projects beyond the original March 31, 2011, deadline to October 31, 2011. Details are presented on page 65 of the seventh report.

As such, figures on the number of projects seeking extension or the value of the federal contribution under Infrastructure Canada's two programs were not included in the seventh report to Canadians. This was noted on page 66 of the seventh report: "Details on the value and number of projects that will be extended into 2011-12 will be known closer to the end of 2010-11 following receipt of estimates from provinces, territories, municipalities or other partners."

[English]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if Question No. 142 could be made an order for return, this return would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 142—Ms. Kirsty Duncan:

With respect to the venous system, and more particularly, chronic cerebrospinal venous insufficiency (CCSVI): (a) what, if any, steps is the government taking to address research questions regarding the venous system, including (i) what does the normal venous system look like, and, specifically, what does it look like in infants, children, and adults, (ii) can the veins, in particular the jugulars and the azygous, look normal, and the flow be abnormal, (iii) what is the normal range of flow through veins, in particular the jugulars and the azygous, (iv) how should normal range of flow through veins, in particular the jugulars and azygous, be defined, (v) what is the normal range of blood gases in veins, in particular the jugulars and the azygous, (vi) what causes venous pathology and when does it occur, (vii) theoretically, what is the complete range of possible vascular problems in the head, neck, chest, and spine, which ones might impact health, and specifically which ones might be linked to multiple sclerosis (MS), (viii) how does the complete range of possible vascular problems compare with those actually seen in patients, (ix) how should abnormal flow through veins, in particular the jugulars and the azygous, be defined, (x) how might abnormal blood gases in veins affect health in the short-term and long-term, (xi) what, if any, reflux is normal in veins, and, if some reflux is normal, what is the 'tipping point' to abnormal, (xii) can a catalogue of venous pathology (in the head, neck, chest and spine), abnormal flow, and potential health impacts be established, (xiii) what protects against abnormal venous pathology and abnormal flow, (xiv) who should receive venous protective measures, and when should protective measures be put in place;

(b) what, if any, steps is the government taking to address research questions regarding the venous system and MS, including, (i) can fluid mechanics predict where physiologic changes in the brain might occur, (ii) how does the neurologist's understanding of flow through the brain compare with that of physicians, (iii) does decreased metabolism lead to hypoxia which may lead to endothelial damage and inflammation, (iv) what occurs first, inflammatory changes in the brain or iron deposition, (v) what role does reduced perfusion have in MS, (vi) does stenosis extracranially cause less perfusion in the brain, (vii) does stenosis extra-cranially cause morphological changes in the brain, (viii) do cerebral veins actually disappear over time, or is it merely a lack of flow that makes them look like they disappear in magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) studies; (ix) what, if any changes beyond lesions, occur in the spinal cord of MS patients, as a result of reduced vertebral flow, (x) do vertebral veins show a similar disappearance over time, (xi) what percentage of MS patients show evidence of venous pathology, as compared to 'normals', (xii) what other venous abnormalities might MS patients have (e.g., bladder, intestine, kidney), might these abnormalities play a role in their disease, and, if so, how should they be imaged and treated, (xiii) what percentage of MS patients show venous abnormalities below the chest (e.g., May Thurner syndrome), and does this have an impact on their disease, (xiv) how does the vascular system of someone with benign MS compare to that of someone with relapsing-remitting, primary progressive or secondary progressive MS; (c) what, if any, steps is the government taking to address research questions regarding CCSVI and MS, including, (i) what is the prevalence of CCSVI in relapsing-remitting, primary progressive or secondary progressive MS, (ii) does CCSVI worsen over time with the progression of disease, (iii) does CCSVI play a role in MS, and, if so, how, (iv) is CCSVI specific to MS, (v) what are the potential health impacts of CCSVI in the short-term, medium-term and long-term, both with and without treatment; (d) what, if any, steps is the government taking to address research questions regarding CCSVI diagnosis, including (i) how do the results of MRI compare with those of ultrasound for diagnosis of CCSVI, (ii) what is the best way to image the venous system and the best way to image venous pathology, (iii) what are the limitations of current diagnostic tools to image the venous system, (iv) should intravascular ultrasound be used, and what are the benefits and the risks, (v) what is the learning curve for the various diagnostic procedures, and what should practitioners undertake to become sufficiently accomplished, (vi) can a standardized protocol be established for diagnosing CCSVI in MS patients, and when should MS patients be tested for CCSVI, (vii) can a standardized system for describing lesions (e.g., type, location) be established, (viii) what should be the decision-making process regarding whether to treat or not to treat (e.g., anatomy, flow, etc.), (ix) should arterial, venous and CSF flow be monitored, how often, and for what purpose, (x) should lesions and iron load be monitored, how often, and for what purpose;

(e) what, if any, steps is the government taking to address research questions regarding CCSVI treatment, including (i) what timescale is useful for treatment of CCSVI, (ii) what are the benefits and risks associated with treatment of CCSVI, (iii) what are best practices for treating each identified vascular problem, (iv) how should a successful CCSVI treatment be defined (e.g., valvular correction, reduction in stenosis, increased flow, improved blood gases), (v) can malformed jugulars and azygous be treated to achieve normal flow, (vi) can malformed jugulars and azygous be treated to achieve a normal range of blood gases, (vii) can jugulars and azygous be sufficiently treated to make up for poor vertebral flow, and, if not, what procedures can be developed to improve vertebral flow, (viii) should stents be used, and, if so, under what circumstances, (ix) what are the immediate complications of CCSVI treatment, and in what percentage of treatments does each occur for each identified abnormality, (x) what is the best follow-up anti-coagulant therapy, what are the potential risks, and what is the prevalence of complications, (xi) what are the best follow-up therapies, including, brain plasticity exercises, nutrition, physiotherapy, speech therapy, etc., and which therapies have the best associated outcomes, (xii) what are late complications, what follow-up is necessary to determine late complications, and in what percentage of treatments does each occur for each identified abnormality, (xiii) what treatments are available should a stent be occluded, either through hyperplasia or thrombosis, (xiv) what is the success rate of each identified treatment for an occluded stent, (v) what, if any, steps is the government taking to address research questions regarding determining the best CCSVI treatment, including, (i) is CCSVI treatment with the addition of pharmacological agents more efficacious than just the CCSVI procedure, (ii) what pharmacological agents could be used to treat venous inflammation, iron storage, and hydrocephaly, and could these agents be added to CCSVI treatment, (iii) what safe apparatuses could be developed to keep treated veins open, (iv) are vein grafts possible, and if so, on whom, and when should they be used, (v) is CCSVI treatment more efficacious with mesenchymal-derived or adipose-derived stem-cell infusion than just the CCSVI procedure alone, (vi) what methods might be added to reduce permeability of the blood-brain barrier, including pharmacological agents and stem cells, (vii) what are the effects of chelators on iron uptake and release from the brain, and might iron chelators be used as therapeutic agents;

(g) what, if any, steps is the government taking to address research questions regarding possible impacts of CCSVI treatment on MS patients, including (i) what impact does CCSVI treatment have on patients immediately, (ii) what impact does CCSVI treatment have on patients at 24 hours, 3 months, 6 months, 1 year, and 2 years, (iii) what does the magnetic resonance venography (MRV) of a treated patient look like at 24 hours, 3 months, 6 months, 1 year, and 2 years, (iv) what percentage of MS patients show functional improvement at 3 months, 6 months, 1 year, and 2 years, (v) what are the most appropriate scales to measure any health impacts following CCSVI treatment as reported by MS patients, (vi) do new scales have to be created to measure reported changes following treatment, (vii) which patients show the greatest improvement, and does early intervention allow for a better outcome, (viii) what are the treatment outcomes associated with each of the identified venous problems, (ix) what percentage of MS patients show a reduction in MS attacks and brain lesions following the CCSVI procedure, (x) what percentage of MS patients with little or mild blockage show improvement following the CCSVI procedure, (xi) for those MS patients whose conditions do not improve or become worse, why does this occur, (h) what, if any, steps is the government taking to address research questions regarding CCSVI re-stenosis and diagnosis, including, (i) what is rate of stenosis for each identified vascular abnormality, (ii) what changes should patients be told to look for in order to recognize whether they are possibly re-stenosing, (iii) what diagnostic methods should be used after treatment for CCSVI, (iv) what diagnostic methods should be used to look for re-stenosis, and at what timescales; (i) what, if any, steps is the government taking to address research questions regarding secondary procedures for CCSVI, including, (i) are secondary procedures safe, and if so, how many, (ii) what should be the follow-up protocol for secondary procedures, (iii) should there be a methodology established regarding whether to do a secondary procedure or not, and (j) what, if any, steps is the government taking to address research questions regarding prevention in the next generation, including, (i) do vascular issues develop in utero, during childhood, or later, and what would be the best methods to discover circulation problems at the earliest time possible to avoid health impacts at a later date, (ii) might vascular birthmarks and tumours be an indication of potential vascular problems, (iii) might skin discolouration, skin abnormalities, and even proliferation of moles be an indication of an autoimmune or neural condition, (iv) might giving vitamin D to pregnant mothers reduce the risk of children being born with, or developing, vascular problems and other conditions and, if so, what dosage is appropriate, (v) do antioxidants, vitamin D and omega 3 reduce vein inflammation, (vi) will giving children and adolescents vitamin D reduce the risk of developing vein inflammation and venous hypertension and, if so, what dosage is appropriate, and what quantity should be recommended for a child with a

Government Orders

family history of CCSVI, vascular problems or MS, etc., (vii) what would be the optimum time to undertake CCSVI treatment to avoid health impacts at a later date?

(Return tabled)

[English]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

FAIR REPRESENTATION ACT

BILL C-20—TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move:

That, in relation to Bill C-20, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867, the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act and the Canada Elections Act, not more than one further sitting day shall be allotted to the consideration at second reading stage of the Bill; and

At fifteen minutes before the expiry of the time provided for government business on the day designated for the consideration of the said stage of the said bill, any proceedings before the House shall be interrupted, if required for the purpose of this Order, and in turn every question necessary for the disposal of the said stage of the bill shall be put forthwith and successively without further debate or amendment.

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 67(1) there will now be a 30 minute question period. I would ask hon. members to keep their questions and responses to about a minute so we can accommodate more questions and more members.

As in previous question periods, members of the opposition will be recognized more often than government members to allow questioning from the opposition parties. Some members of the government will no doubt be accommodated as well.

The hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh.

• (1100)

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are again going down the same road which the government has obviously chosen to go down to thwart debate in the House, and quite frankly to thwart the democracy that the debate supports.

I want to put on the record again in *Hansard* that the Conservatives have obviously decided that they want to set a record for the number of time allocation motions. We are up to 43 sitting days so far in this session of Parliament. They are trying to catch up with the Liberals and are doing a really good job at it.

The Liberals took 122 sitting days before they set the record with nine time allocation motions. As this is the seventh one by the government in 43 days, I ask the government House leader, how many more are we going to have? On what possible basis can he say that we need time allocation for this bill which has changed quite dramatically from its earlier incarnation? There is a significant shift in the bill that requires significant debate.

Government Orders

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the question, if there is a record being set, I think it has been set by the opposition. That would be the record for the most number of reasoned amendments ever in such a short period of time. Those are amendments from the opposition that aim to prevent a bill from getting past second reading. The opposition has moved such a reasoned amendment, saying that this bill should not go past second reading. The opposition has made up its mind. It has said that the debate is over. It has said that it is going to vote against the bill. All that is left is to allow this House to decide. That is the purpose of our motion, to allow it to happen.

The reason we think it is important to do so in this case is best captured in the words of the member for Hamilton Centre, the NDP critic for democratic reform, who said, "If we don't have those seats available"—the ones that are being generated by this bill—"for the next election, then the government has failed in terms of the promise they made".

As we know, the census results will be released in February. The redistribution process will begin at that point. That means this bill has to get through this House at second reading, through a committee, back to this House for report stage and third reading, then over to the Senate for second reading, through committee, and third reading there, and then royal assent by the Governor General, all before the redistribution process in order to fulfill the objectives set out by the NDP critic for democratic reform.

That sets out the imperative of the timeline we are under, the reason we feel the need to move in this fashion to achieve those objectives. That is indeed why we are doing it in this case.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I listened to the government House leader, particularly when he was quoting me, which I stand by.

I think it is the purpose for all of us. We go through a lot of different processes in the course of debate. There is a lot of zigging and a lot of zagging, but at the end of the day, I think there is a collective commitment, certainly I know the government has one and we in the official opposition have one, to have the appropriate bill in place that gives our provinces and territories the appropriate number of seats.

We have a challenge in front of us. We have the government bill in front of us, which I believe is the third go-around on this matter. We also have the bill put forward by the official opposition. They are apart, but I want to say that there is a closer resemblance to our bill and where the government is now.

If the government is planning to slice off debate here due to the time limits, will the government House leader assure us that we will have adequate time at committee to do the work that is necessary, or is he going to thoroughly stifle all democratic debate on a democratic bill and deny us the opportunity to do the work we need to do?

• (1105)

Hon. Tim Uppal (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Madam Speaker, our government received a strong mandate to move toward fair representation in the House of Commons.

We have presented a principled formula, a formula that is fair for all provinces and moves every single province closer to representa-

tion by population. It is based on population figures. It is based on the fact that we have growing provinces. The provinces of Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario are significantly under-represented. It is important that we add seats to those provinces to bring them closer to representation by population.

Again, this formula brings every province closer to representation by population. We have made a commitment that we would move forward on this. That is exactly what we are doing.

The NDP members have already staked out their position. They do not even want this bill to get to second reading. They do not even want it to get to committee. They are talking about committee, but they are the ones who do not want this bill to move to committee.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have a question for the House leader.

This is the umpteenth time we are debating closure instead of using House time to debate bills. I am wondering how his calculation has now come down to one day. Does that mean all future bills will be debated in less than an hour or 10 minutes, or is it going to be brought down to a few seconds? That is my question to the House leader.

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Speaker, it is important that we get this bill to committee and passed, so the seats are available to bring Canadians fair representation and every province closer to representation by population as soon as possible. We ask the opposition to support us in passing this bill.

I have a question for the opposition. What does it have against Alberta, B.C. and Ontario getting closer to representation by population? They are significantly under-represented. As members of the House, it is our responsibility to ensure that every province gets closer to representation by population.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I find the trend of the government to be deeply disturbing. One is an obvious contempt for the traditions of Parliament. We are sent to the House by people from across this country to represent our regions and people, and to ensure that there is balance in legislation. Nothing is more profound than the discussion about new seat distribution.

I see the second element of the Conservative agenda being wedge politics, to accuse opposition members, who want to ensure this is done right, of somehow having something against Alberta or Ontario. I find that an odious inference.

But I find it much more odious that the government will not allow proper debate on a bill which is fundamentally about nation building. Why does it continually show contempt for the House? If it does not want debate in the House, why is this place open at all? Why is not just a Mr. Harper autocracy?

Government Orders

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I would remind all members to refrain from using the names of sitting members.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, I am very sorry for saying Mr. Harper's name in the House. An autocracy of—

The Deputy Speaker: I would ask the hon. member to come to order.

The hon. Minister of State for Democratic Reform.

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Speaker, the NDP talks about debate, but the fact is that after having just started debate on fair representation in the House of Commons yesterday, within the first hour it moved an amendment not to allow this bill to pass second reading and get to committee. It talks about working in committee, but it moved an amendment not to allow it to get to committee.

It has made up its mind. It is not going to support this bill. Conservatives believe that members of the House of Commons should decide on that. We should have a vote and let them decide.

• (1110)

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Madam Speaker, I strongly support the government moving expeditiously on this bill. This is an incredibly important bill. This bill would ensure fair representation by population in the chamber. This is one of the most important pieces of legislation the government has brought forward. In fact, this is the third iteration of a bill that was introduced in previous parliaments. This is incredibly important.

We have record high levels of immigration to Canada. We admit people from around the world and we cannot have that policy on the one hand and on the other hand deny new Canadians in the emerging new Canada a voice in the House. This bill would give Ontario an additional 15 seats. In regions of Ontario which are most rapidly growing, places like Brampton, Mississauga, the greater Toronto area, this is an incredibly important bill.

This is the base on which Confederation was founded in 1867. It was the leader of the Liberal Party, George Brown, who argued for representation by population. This bill respects that fundamental constitutional principle.

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Speaker, my colleague brings up a very good point. He talked about new Canadians and visible minorities. The fact is that through immigration our population has been growing, and visible minorities and new Canadians tend to live in the fastest growing provinces of Alberta, B.C. and Ontario. They live in communities that are the fastest growing and that has left new Canadians and visible minorities among the most under-represented.

I would ask the opposition to move forward with this bill in order to allow fair representation for new Canadians and visible minorities. It should not delay this bill. It is very important that we get this bill passed and allow fair representation for all Canadians. It would bring every province closer to representation by population.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Madam Speaker, all governments believe that their bills are very important and should be passed expeditiously, but the process of our democracy is that we debate bills in the House in order to improve them, so that they can get to the best point to be passed. That is the

purpose of first reading, second reading, third reading and committee work.

In the past, time allocation was an unusual procedure in the House. I use, for example, Louis-René Beaudoin who was the member for Vaudreuil—Soulanges in the 1950s. He was also Speaker of the House and during the famous pipeline debate, he moved with the government a time allocation motion. There were weeks of chaos in the House due to the cutting off of debate because it was so unusual.

I find it sincerely disturbing that the government is using this so often. Where is the respect for democracy? Where is the respect for the traditions of the House?

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Speaker, it is true that many bills of this government are very important. We made a commitment that we would move forward and get those passed as soon as possible.

Specifically, the bill adds more seats to the under-represented provinces and is based on a timeline. There is no doubt that we have a timeline here. We have made a commitment that we would pass this bill and go through the entire process within our mandate. It is important that we do that. It is important that we do that so the under-represented provinces gain more seats and move closer to representation by population.

The bill actually brings every province closer to representation by population. It fulfills our commitment to move the House closer to fairer representation.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we find it truly amazing that the bill came before this chamber just yesterday. Just yesterday the government introduced a bill that is going to substantially increase the number of members of Parliament. The Conservatives then expect within a few hours of debate that we should all be content with that and allow the bill to go to committee.

My question is for the government House leader. How does he, with any credibility whatsoever, go to the public and say that this is a just system, that this system is allowing for open debate, that we are allowing for the public, through their elected members of Parliament, to be able to question the government, to stand and express what they think?

Why, within minutes of having the bill debated, have you taken the heavy hand of a majority government—

• (1115)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I would ask all members to direct their questions through the Chair.

The hon. government House leader.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Madam Speaker, as I said earlier, actually before we took the step of moving time allocation in this case, there was already a motion from the opposition that the bill not proceed beyond second reading, that it not go to committee. That was the purpose of the opposition's motion, that it not be allowed to go through the process and that debate actually be cut off. That was not our idea. The idea to cut off debate at the end of second reading was a motion from the opposition.

Government Orders

After that we felt it necessary, since it was clear the issue was decided, as the opposition had indicated it would oppose it and the government was going to support it, that it was time for the House to decide and allow it to go to committee where the work can be done.

Then it would go to report stage where work can be done, to third reading where again there will be votes and work can be done, and then to make it over to the Senate. We do have that priority of ensuring that the bill puts fairness into our democratic system to ensure that we move closer to that fundamental democratic principle of each individual's vote having equal weight in time for the next redistribution when the census results do come out early next year.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Madam Speaker, once again, this is undemocratic, undemocratic, undemocratic.

How can this government stand before Canadians and dare to say that it was elected by a majority of Canadians, when only 39% of Canadians voted for it?

How can it say that this bill is fair, especially to Quebec, which will be under-represented, even though it was recognized as a founding nation of the country in a motion unanimously adopted by the House in 2006?

Quebec will now end up under-represented in this House. How can the government claim that this bill will be fair to everyone?

[English]

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Speaker, we received a strong mandate from Canadians to bring every province closer to representation by population. We made a commitment that Quebec's representation would be equal to its population. Quebec has 23% of the population so after this formula is in place it would have 23% of the seats in this House of Commons. The numbers speak for themselves and we need to move forward on this bill.

[Translation]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Madam Speaker, there are two fundamental issues in this bill. The first is seat distribution and the fair representation of all Canadians in this House. Another thing that many Canadians are wondering is whether we will continue to increase the number of seats every time we have a census. Is there a limit? Those are the two main issues, which are perhaps a bit contradictory, that should be at the heart of the debates.

When we pass a bill at second reading it means that we pass it in principle. That seriously—and in some cases almost completely—limits the possibility of making amendments in committee. I think that one day of debate is not enough time for members from all the parties to return to their ridings and talk to their constituents. A government member said it himself: this is the third version. Is this formula the right one? Did the government take the right approach? I think we should have had the time to consult our constituents so that we can properly represent them in this rather important debate.

[English]

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Speaker, this formula, which is fair for all provinces, would bring in reasonable growth for the House of Commons now and into the future. When the Liberals were in

government, they always picked winners and losers and they put one part of the country against another.

I would ask the hon. member, under the Liberals' plan who are the winners? Which provinces would win and which would lose? Under the Liberals' plan, they would be taking away seats and giving them to others so they would choose winners and losers. Who would be the winners and who would be the losers under their plan?

[Translation]

Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the minister if, while weighing this issue, he is keeping in mind the possibility of a constitutional crisis, as we have seen in the past. If he is not considering that, I am wondering if perhaps it is part of the Conservative strategy to create a constitutional crisis.

• (1120)

[English]

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Speaker, the provisions in this bill were actually changed, under section 44 of the Constitution, which is within the authority of Parliament to do. This has been done in the past. In the late 1980s, Parliament changed the number of seats in the House of Commons through section 44. So it is within Parliament's authority to change the Constitution to bring under-represented provinces closer to representation by population.

[Translation]

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): Madam Speaker, in his speech a few minutes ago, the hon. member for Compton—Stanstead mentioned only one concern about the bill the government has introduced. And I heard the word “ridiculous”. When the first concern was raised, members of the government, without hesitation, used the word “ridiculous”, off the record. Are we to understand that the goal is to silence debate on a fundamental issue, thus demonstrating clear contempt for democracy and the opposition's opinions? Are we to understand that there will be no debate on an issue as important as representation in this House?

[English]

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Speaker, I actually did not hear a question. However, I will take the time to outline the commitments of our government on fair representation.

We committed that we would bring more seats to the under-represented provinces of Alberta, B.C. and Ontario because their populations have been growing and they are significantly under-represented. We committed that we would maintain the seats of the smaller provinces and we also committed that the representation of Quebec would equal its population. We made those commitments, we received a strong mandate to move forward on those commitments, and this bill, the fair representation act, does that. It is important that we move forward and I would ask the opposition to support us on that.

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise to ask the minister a question on the proposed legislation. I am from the province of Alberta. Alberta has been under-represented for a long time. It is really important that the bill go through so that the officials will have time to make all the adjustments necessary to add riding seats in the various provinces.

Government Orders

My question for the minister is this: how many seats would Alberta get, and what would that do in terms of fixing under-representation in Alberta?

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Speaker, under this formula Alberta would get six new seats. That would bring Alberta closer to representation by population.

It is only fair that these under-represented provinces of Alberta, B. C. and Ontario be fairly represented. They have had increases in population, either through immigration or through people moving from one part of the country to the other, and Canadians expect fair and equitable representation in their democratic institutions.

To the greatest extent possible, every vote should carry equal weight. This bill would bring every province closer to representation by population.

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the government repeatedly alludes to representation by population and fairness as being the key issues here. We do not have much opportunity to investigate what the government perceives to be fair or unfair because of its time allocation.

I will present the following circumstance. The President of the Queen's Privy Council, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, represents a constituency with 30,000 people, called Labrador.

In applying its principles of fairness and representation by population, is the government announcing to the House that it intends to dramatically expand the boundary of the current electoral district of Labrador to include a much broader constituency with representation by population equal to the rest of the country? I ask because we could only conclude at this point in time, without any proper debate, that it indeed intends to do so, and the people of Labrador should be aware of that intention.

• (1125)

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Speaker, it is quite obvious that the hon. member has not read the bill.

We made a commitment that we would protect the seats of the smaller provinces that have not had the growth. Perhaps he should be very careful and listen to what his own party, the Liberal Party, is proposing. It is the Liberal Party that is proposing to move seats around and take seats away from those provinces. I would suggest he talk to members in his own party and his own leader to see what their plan is, because it is a dangerous plan. We, on the other hand, committed to protect the seats of the smaller-growth provinces.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Madam Speaker, I just heard the minister say that he was going to protect the seats of the smaller provinces.

I would like the minister to tell me if he is going to protect the seats in northern Ontario. We have some huge ridings in northern Ontario. To go from one end of my riding to the other end takes me anywhere from six and a half to eight hours.

Is the minister willing to protect those ridings in northern Ontario where the population is spread out over probably three or four times the size of Prince Edward Island?

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Speaker, yes, we would actually add 15 new seats to the province of Ontario, because it is under-represented.

The population has grown, and we would add those seats to bring it closer to representation by population.

The question also gives me the opportunity to explain that the bill would add seats. The redistribution of the ridings themselves would be done by an independent non-partisan commission. It would begin its work sometime next year, if the members support us in moving this bill forward, to look at the redistribution of the ridings themselves.

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Madam Speaker, debating is not delaying; it is democracy.

My question is for the Minister of State for Democratic Reform. Does he not find it painfully ironic that he is stifling debate for approximately 45% of the House when we are discussing representation? The government is stifling representatives from talking about representation. Does the minister not find that ironic?

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Speaker, I believe the hon. member was probably not here yesterday when her own party—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Vaudreuil-Soulanges on a point of order.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, the hon. member will know that it is not parliamentary to refer to a member's absence or presence in the House.

The Deputy Speaker: I believe the hon. minister is aware of that.

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Speaker, I understand. I am saying that the hon. member may not have known that it was her own party that, within the first hour of debate on the bill, moved a motion to end debate and not let it move to second reading. Those members do not even want the bill to go to committee stage.

NDP members have already made up their minds that they will not support the bill. They do not want debate. They do not want it to move to committee stage, but the House of Commons should decide on the bill.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matapédia, BQ): Madam Speaker, today we have to realize that this bill is important. It changes the political weight of all the provinces, and that of the Quebec nation in particular.

Earlier, I heard the Minister of State for Democratic Reform respond to a question from the opposition. He asked why the opposition was unhappy to see Alberta, Ontario and British Columbia have their political weight increased. He chose not to mention Quebec. You can check the blues, Madam Speaker. The minister really did word it that way.

When a bill is drafted that changes the political weight of representatives from each province, it is important to consider that reality. I would like to hear the minister's thoughts on that.

Government Orders

[English]

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Speaker, I was talking about the under-represented provinces. Alberta, B.C. and Ontario are under-represented; Quebec currently is not under-represented. It is actually fairly represented or overrepresented.

We made a commitment that Quebec would remain proportionally represented according to its population. At the end of the day, when everything is done here and the bill passes, Quebec will have 23% of the population and 23% of the seats of the House of Commons. That is fair. This bill is fair for all provinces.

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord has 30 seconds to ask one last very brief question.

• (1130)

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Madam Speaker, unfortunately, so much remains to be said.

Where is the urgency? We are talking about the future of this country and this House. The next election will be in four years' time. Where is the urgency?

[English]

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Speaker, absolutely there is urgency. As the government House leader has explained, in February the Statistics Canada census numbers are revealed and a process begins. If we are to move forward on adding seats to the under-represented provinces to move every province closer to representation by population, we need to move the bill forward. We have made the commitment to move this bill forward, to pass the bill and complete the entire process within our mandate.

The formula is a principle-based formula. It is fair for all provinces. It is important that we move forward.

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith the question necessary to dispose of the motion now before the House.

[English]

The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

• (1210)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 52)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Aglukkaq
Albas	Albrecht
Alexander	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Allison	Amblor
Ambrose	Anderson
Armstrong	Aspin
Baird	Bateman
Benoit	Bernier
Bezan	Blaney
Block	Boughen
Braid	Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Brown (Barrie)	Brunoogoe
Butt	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan
Carmichael	Carrie
Chisu	Chong
Clarke	Clement
Daniel	Davidson
Dechert	Del Mastro
Devolin	Dreeshen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Dykstra
Fantino	Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Galipeau	Gallant
Gill	Glover
Goguen	Golding
Goodyear	Gosal
Gourde	Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hayes	Hiebert
Hillyer	Hoback
Hocppner	Holder
James	Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauzon	Lee
Leitch	Lemieux
Leung	Lizon
Lobb	Lukiwski
Lunney	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Mayes
McColeman	McLeod
Menegakis	Merrifield
Miller	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
O'Neill Gordon	Oda
Opitz	Paradis
Payne	Penashue
Policivrc	Preston
Raitt	Rajotte
Rathgeber	Reid
Rempel	Richards
Richardson	Rickford
Ritz	Saxton
Schellenberger	Seaback
Shea	Shipley
Smith	Sopuck
Sorenson	Stanton
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Tilson
Toet	Toews
Trout	Trotter
Truppe	Tweed
Uppal	Valcourt
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vellacott	Wallace

Warawa
Watson
Sky Country)
Weston (Saint John)
Williamson
Woodworth
Young (Oakville)
Zimmer — 153

Warkentin
Weston (West Vancouver —Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Wilks
Wong
Yelich
Young (Vancouver South)

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)
Angus
Atamanenko
Ayala
Bellavance
Benskin
Blanchette
Boivin
Boulérice
Brahmi
Brosscau
Caron
Clash
Chicoine
Christopherson
Coderre
Côté
Cuzner
Day
Donnelly
Dubé
Duncan (Edmonton —Strathcona)
Easter
Fortin
Fry
Genest
Giguère
Goedale
Grogubé
Harris (St. John's East)
Hughes
Jacob
Kellway
Lapointe
Latendresse
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Liu
Mai
Martin
Mathysen
McQuinty
Michaud
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Nantel
Nunez-Melo
Papillon
Péclét
Plamondon
Rac
Raynault
Rousscau
Savoie
Sellah
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)
Sims (Newton—North Delta)
Sitsabaiesan
Stoffer
Thibeault
Tremblay
Valériote — 119

Andrews
Ashton
Aubin
Bélanger
Bennett
Bevington
Blanchette-Lamothe
Borg
Boutin-Sweet
Brison
Byrne
Casey
Charlton
Choquette
Cleary
Comartin
Cotler
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Dionne Labelle
Doré Lefebvre
Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duscault
Eyking
Freeman
Garrison
Genest-Jourdain
Godin
Gravelle
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Ilsu
Ilyer
Julian
Lamoureux
Larose
Laverdière
Leslie
MacAulay
Marston
Masse
May
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Murray
Nicholls
Pacetti
Patry
Perreault
Quach
Ravignat
Regan
Sandhu
Scarpalleggia
Sgro
Stewart
Sullivan
Toone
Trudeau

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, although the Minister of State for Transport was in his chair, he was not in his seat when the

Government Orders

call for the vote occurred and, therefore, his vote should be discounted.

Hon. Steven Fletcher: Mr. Speaker, I was going to rise on the same point of order. Although some members of the House may not have noticed, I sneaked in just after you began the vote. I concur that perhaps in this case my vote should be withdrawn.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, before the minister made that comment, I was rising to my feet to say that, given the responsibility that we have to accommodate, his vote should be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: The minister of state has indicated that he was not in his place at the correct time, but is it the will of the House to allow his vote to count?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

An hon. member: No.

The Speaker: I wish to inform the House that because of the proceedings on the time allocation motion, government orders will be extended by 30 minutes.

SECOND READING

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-20, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867, the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act and the Canada Elections Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Hon. Steven Fletcher: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. For the record, I appreciated that there would have been unanimous consent in the House but I refused that consent to allow my vote. I appreciate the sentiment for accommodation but, at the end of the day, the rules are the rules and they must be followed, regardless of who the individual is or why the individual missed the timing, which is why I refused the unanimous consent.

I do appreciate the sentiment of the House, which was to allow the vote. It makes for an interesting philosophical debate, and I am thankful.

The Speaker: The House appreciates both of the sentiments on the particular question.

The hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh on debate.

• (1215)

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will not be taking up the rest of my speech because I need to be in committee at this point.

The Speaker: The hon. member had 18 minutes left. However, if his speech is finished, we should have questions and comments.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have one very brief question to the member.

I am curious to know what the NDP position is regarding the Conservative proposal that we increase the overall number of seats inside the House of Commons. Does the NDP have a position as to whether we should be increasing the number of seats?

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, that is our party position.

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Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like the hon. member to answer a question I asked one of his colleagues yesterday—the member would have to stay here, though—about the NDP amendment. If the amendment is rejected by the House—which is what will most likely happen, considering the Conservatives' attitude on this—what will the NDP's position be regarding the actual vote on the Conservative government's bill? I would remind the member that the bill denies the Quebec nation's rights and goes against the will of Quebec, particularly that of the Quebec National Assembly, which has unanimously adopted motions on several occasions calling on the government to maintain Quebec's political weight here in this House.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, as for our position, we in the NDP want the political weight of Quebec to remain unchanged. It absolutely must stay the same, if possible. That is our position and we will continue to fight for that.

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the honourable NDP member a question regarding the relatively short speech he just made. I was in the House when the speech was shortened because so little time was allocated. I would like to know what the member really thinks of Quebec's political weight, which will decrease under the bill introduced by the government. We heard the Liberals' position yesterday. I would like him to compare the positions taken by the government, the Liberals and the NDP.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, my understanding is that the Liberals do not want any changes. They do not wish to add any seats in this chamber. To answer the rest of the question, it is very clear that the position of the Conservative government at this point is that three seats should be added in Quebec. That is all it is willing to do and we do not find this acceptable.

[English]

Mr. Kyle Seebach (Brampton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak today in support of Bill C-20, the fair representation bill.

Last week, I had the privilege of being in Brampton with the Minister of State for Democratic Reform when we introduced the bill. I was happy to host him in my riding because Brampton West, as members of the House may or may not know, is somewhat of a poster child for the need for additional representation in the House of Commons.

As the minister mentioned yesterday in his remarks, according to the 2006 census, my riding was the largest in Canada. I have to admit that may not necessarily be the case now, as my friend from Oak Ridges—Markham may have overtaken me in the last five years, but I still represent one of the largest ridings in the country.

By the last census, Brampton West was home to the largest number of Canadians in any one constituency, in excess of 170,400 people. The population growth has continued and the number of people in my riding has significantly increased and, by my estimates, now stands at approximately 190,000 people. As the minister remarked yesterday, that 170,000 compares to an average national riding size of just under 113,000. That is quite a gap. Representing that many people is a challenge.

I represent a lot of people in a small geographic area. I also recognize that representing a smaller number of Canadians but over an exponentially larger riding is also a daunting challenge of a different type, which many of my colleagues face.

Which ridings are largest, whether on the basis of population or land, is not as important as the principles of fairness behind the system that apportions our ridings. The current formula that determines the number of seats in each province is unbalanced and needs a fix. In fact, under our current formula, Ontario would only receive three additional seats. This bill is a fair, principled and reasonable fix.

The bill also fulfills our government's commitment to move toward fairer representation in the House of Commons. During the last election, we made three distinct promises to Canadians with respect to fairness in representation.

First, we committed to increasing the number of seats now and in the future to better reflect the population growth in the faster growing provinces of British Columbia, Ontario and Alberta. Second, we committed that we would continue to protect the number of seats for smaller provinces. Finally, we committed to protecting and ensuring the proportional representation of Quebec.

We made those promises during our election campaign and Canadians delivered a strong, stable, national, majority Conservative government. Our strong, stable, national, majority Conservative government will be fulfilling those promises with this bill.

Canadians strongly believe in fairness in representation. Fairness in representation for all Canadians is an important goal. We said this before and we will continue to say it. The vote of every Canadian to the greatest extent possible should have equal weight. Without the passage of the bill, we will continue to move away from fairness.

The faster growing provinces need to be treated much more fairly. Furthermore, failing to provide a fair level of representation to these rapidly growing provinces and regions is to deny new Canadians, and visible minorities in particular, their rightful voice in the chamber.

I have the privilege of representing a riding that has a large number of visible minorities and new Canadians. By recent statistics, Brampton West is home to a 55% visible minority population and their votes right now are not being treated equally with other voters across this country.

The proportion of new Canadians living and arriving in the fast growing areas of the country is much higher than elsewhere. Population projections confirm this. The GTA, the region where I come from, is projected to grow by 50% over the next 20 years. A similar trend is projected for Vancouver, Calgary and Edmonton.

• (1220)

The number of visible minorities in our country will continue to grow. In fact, Statistics Canada reports that, by 2031, one in three Canadians will be a visible minority, up to 14.4 million Canadians. The fact is Canadians in the fastest-growing areas of our provinces are being severely shortchanged with their representation. The effects of the representational imbalance are real. They are real for Canadians in fast-growing provinces whose voices are not heard in the chamber, not represented here and not heard as strongly as they should be.

By allowing under-representation to continue, we are sending a signal to those Canadians that their interests are not as important as those from other regions of the country and that they should somehow count for less. That is not fair. This is not what we should be saying to the, but it is the result of the current flawed formula and it will stay that way until we change it.

The bill proposes to change it and change it in a principled, balanced and fair way. That is why I do not understand the reasoning behind the NDP's amendment. It moved an amendment yesterday to refuse to give second reading to the bill, and I am quite surprised. I recall just last week, on the day we introduced the bill, the NDP critic, the member for Hamilton Centre, sat beside his leader and told the assembled media that this was a good bill. He said that the bill was a positive step that moved in the right direction. We are still moving in the same direction and the direction has not changed. We are moving in the direction of fairer representation for Canadians in faster-growing provinces who are increasingly under-represented.

This problem is particularly serious in and around my riding. Within a 15-minute drive of my riding, I can reach seven of the ten largest ridings by population in all of Canada. The member for Hamilton Centre can get to all of those seven ridings in a fairly short trip as well. He is from an urban centre just as I am. He knows we face large representation problems that must be fixed. He has said so in the past. In fact, a large number of his NDP colleagues should well know the under-representation problems we face. After all, many of them were elected in the hearts of urban centres.

There are fundamental and important questions that need answering and fairness that needs achieving. The NDP amendment says no, that there will be no answers. It says that New Democrats do not want balanced, reasonable, nationally-applicable fairness. It says that they want something else. They are wrong. New Democrats do not seem to be on board with ensuring fair representation to the rapidly-growing populations of Canadians in Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta. Instead, they are obstructing this fair and reasonable bill and attempting to offer a flawed alternative in its place. Their alternative has dubious constitutional credentials and I personally do not think it will fly.

As I have said, their bill's viability aside, we are dealing with important issues of fundamental, democratic fairness. These issues get to the heart of our ability to be effective representatives for our constituents. One of the greatest demands of constituents is a sense of equality in their voting power and privilege. Their votes should have roughly equal weight. As we all know, right now that is not the case.

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Taking a look at the riding of Brampton West is the perfect example of that. The riding of Brampton West has a larger population than Prince Edward Island, which has four members of Parliament. The voices of voters in Brampton West are not being treated equally.

Yes, change is a very complicated thing, no one is denying that, and I understand the desire to get it right, but we cannot make perfect the enemy of very good. There is no way we will ever have a perfect system of representation by population in Canada. We have other competing but equally-important principles that must also be preserved for the health of our country. We do not propose to move so far toward representation by population to disturb the other constitutionally-enshrined principles.

• (1225)

Bill C-20 would allow smaller and slower-growing provinces to maintain their current number of seats. This is fair. We must maintain their effective representation. The legislation would also fulfill our platform commitment to maintain Quebec's representation in the House of Commons at a level proportionate to its population. That is also fair. We are keeping our promise that we made to Quebecers.

We will also be fair by ensuring that the seat allocation formula will ensure it does not move overrepresented provinces under the levels which their populations warrant. This is also a very important point, as it will protect and promote the principle of proportionate representation, one of the fundamental principles in our Constitution, right along with representation by population. As we have been emphasizing, the bill would also better respect and maintain representation by population. The bill has national application that is fair for all provinces.

As the minister has said, Canadians from all backgrounds in all parts of the country expect and deserve fair representation. However, we have allowed the House to move too far away from representation by population, that founding constitutional principle. The gap between how many voters an MP represents in a fast-growing province compared to one in a smaller or slower-growing province has never been greater. The gap today is bigger than at any point in our country's history since 1867. I know first-hand about that inequality and it is something we absolutely have to change.

While balancing the need to respect the other foundational principles, we need to move much closer to representation by population. Bill C-20 would do that by increasing the seat counts for the faster-growing provinces, both now and into the future, by ensuring that population growth would be more accurately factored into the seat allocation formula. In this way, the principle of representation by population would be followed to a much larger degree, which would be fairer to all Canadians.

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The representation gap that my colleagues have spoken of will become much smaller and the fast-growth problem, under the current formula, will be stopped. This bill would ensure that when we allocated seats to each province, we would use the best data available to us.

This too speaks to fairness. Instead of using the census population numbers, the bill would use Statistics Canada's annual population estimates. These estimates provide the best data we have on the total provincial populations across the country. In this way, we will ensure that Canadians in the fastest-growing provinces get the representation that they so well deserve. This will be especially helpful for people in areas just like mine because their growth will not stop in these fast-growing areas. Day after day, week after week more residents are moving into the fast-growing areas and into Brampton West. I witnessed them replacing the rows of corn that used to grow, with rows of houses. This growth will not stop and we cannot continue under the same formula.

We will also maintain the independent process that draws the riding boundaries in every province, ensuring that process also has the best data available to it. The readjustment of the electoral boundaries will be done using the census data, as it always has been done.

The minister and my colleagues have made this point before me, but it is important to make it again. There will be no change to the independent boundary process. It will remain fair, impartial and independent. As has been pointed out, we will make some changes to streamline the process. We will make some timeline changes, though they will not affect the quality of the process, only the timing.

• (1230)

I have made the point already that if we wait too long, Canadians will have to go on for another decade, with worse and worse representation. That is not acceptable. On this side of the House, we will ensure that this does not happen.

This bill, the fair representation act, is a principled update to the formula allocating House of Commons seats. It is fair, it is reasonable and it is principled. It will achieve better representation for fast growing provinces where better representation is so desperately needed. It delivers on our government's long-standing commitments, and I am proud to stand in the House today and say that I fully support it, along with my colleagues.

• (1235)

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, before we resumed this part of the day, I asked the minister if this would affect the ridings of northern Ontario. I told the minister that some of the ridings in northern Ontario were bigger than some provinces. The minister did not answer. He skated around the question.

Therefore, would the member tell me if northern Ontario will lose ridings because of the redistribution?

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Mr. Speaker, as my hon. colleague well knows, the decisions on how the ridings will be distributed will be made by an independent, impartial commission. It will do it in the best interests not only of Canadians, but of Canadians and Ontarians who live in the north to ensure the representation is fair going forward.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague has not been here a long time, but the issue of redistribution of and adding seats has been talked about for very long time.

I also remind my hon. colleague about the massive deficit that our country is facing and the layoffs of public servants that we know is happening. A lot of people throughout Canada are unemployed.

Does he really think Canada needs more MPs at this time? Is it not fact that for those whose ridings are geographically challenged or have a population in excess of a certain number, they could simply add an extra staff member to those ridings and continue to serve their constituents just fine?

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to respond to these types of criticisms.

We are moving toward fairer representation. That is the fundamental principle of the bill. The people in Brampton West should have their vote be relatively equal to the people who vote in Prince Edward Island or in my hon. colleague's riding. The bill seeks to address that issue.

We are not going to leave the number of seats in the House of Commons the way it is, like the Liberals are proposing, or pick winners or losers. My question to my friend opposite is this. Who are the winners and losers they are picking under their formula? Which provinces are they taking seats away from? Could the member advise the House of that?

Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we all know, the principle of proportional representation was established in Canada in the middle of the 19th century at a time when there was no income tax for individuals. We did not have the corporate tax structure we have now.

Would the member not agree with me that today when the role of the House in determining government spending, in ensuring accountability for taxpayers, the principle of proportional representation is more important than ever and that by opposing these measures through a period of minority government over the last seven years and in the current Parliament, the members opposite, in both parties, are in effect opposing equity and accountability for taxpayers for the way that their hard-earned money is spent by the Government of Canada?

Would the member agree with me on that?

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Mr. Speaker, as I have listened to the debate in the House and heard the comments made outside of the House by members of the opposition, I am still unable to understand why they do not want to support the principle of fairness, fairness on all the levels that my friend just mentioned. This is something that is of central importance to Canadians. I know it is of central importance to the voters of my riding of Brampton West. They talk to me about it. They want us to move forward with this and that is exactly what we will do.

[Translation]

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this country, and this chamber in particular, has a long history of debates about representation. We know that Quebec had a special place in the House of Commons when our country was established.

I would like to ask my colleague, because another colleague mentioned the 19th century, what the representation of Quebecers is under the Constitution Act, 1867, in particular section 51. Can the member explain to the House what section 51 means and tell us if the bill is consistent with that section? Can he clarify section 51 of the Constitution Act, 1867 for the House?

● (1240)

[English]

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Mr. Speaker, of course Quebec is special to the Canadian federation. It always has been and it always will be. The proposals that we are making in the bill are constitutionally sound and on a good footing.

My question for the member opposite is, when he says there should be more seats for Quebec than it is being granted, what does he say to the voters in my riding? Will he go up to them and say, “I’m sorry sir, I’m sorry madam, you deserve to be continuously under-represented so we can have more seats for Quebec”. Is he willing to go to my riding and ask voters that question?

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my hon. colleague’s speech, in particular to a question to my colleague from York West, because it seems to me he is suggesting that there would be an ongoing process whereby every few years more and more members would be added to the House of Commons in an unlimited manner.

Based on what he is saying, if we are never prepared to take away seats from a province because of the fact that its population has not increased as much as other provinces, then we will always add more and more members. On that basis we would add on an infinite number of members in the House. We could have 1,000, 2,000. It could go on and on. Is that not unreasonable and unrealistic? Is it not possible to find a fairer way to adjust the numbers across the country without continually adding numbers to the House?

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Mr. Speaker, the current formula as proposed in the bill does allow for reductions in seats based on population decline. However, what we are not prepared to do on this side of the House, what we keep hearing from that side of the House, particularly in that corner, is to pit Canadians against each other. They want to pick winners and losers. They want to say this province should have more and therefore we are taking away from that province.

That is not how we are going to approach this issue. We want all Canadians to be together behind the bill so they have fairer representation. We are not going to follow the model proposed by members from that party.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Haltoun Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party is being disingenuous with its proposal to reappropriate seats in this House. In its proposal, according to the analysis that has been completed, the province of Quebec would lose six seats in the House, Manitoba would lose three seats,

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Saskatchewan would lose five seats, Nova Scotia would lose one seat, and Newfoundland and Labrador would lose one seat.

This is not a proposal that the Liberals would ever have introduced as government and it is indicative of a party that wants to play games on this issue. This is the fairest way for us to ensure that the rapidly growing populations, most of whom are new Canadians and recent immigrants who have come to this country, are in the three provinces of Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia. This bill will ensure they have fair representation in the House and ensure that the number of visible minorities in the House increases after the next election.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Mr. Speaker, I could not have said it better myself. That is exactly the road that we are not going to go down on this side of the House. We are not going to pick winners and losers. We are not going to pit one region of the country against another for political gain like the members of that party seem to be suggesting. We are not going to be taking away seats from Quebec or other provinces.

That is a flawed formula. We are not following it. We have the right formula and I hope the members on that side of the House will stand with us and vote in favour of it when the time comes.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise and speak on behalf of the people of Timmins—James Bay, a region that is larger than Great Britain. It is important to put the size of my riding into context in the debate because we are talking about what is fair.

We heard this morning the fact that the Conservative government once again has tried to shut down fair debate on the bill. There is the sense that there are beleaguered members on the government side who represent communities that are completely unfairly under-represented.

We have heard throughout the morning about the principle of representation by population, yet we know that Canada is not based simply on representation by population. If it were, we would start to erase most of the political map of Canada. Labrador, with 26,000 people in its riding, would cease to exist.

I ask my hon. colleagues from the suburbs, do they believe that those 26,000 people are somehow over-represented or the riding of Western Arctic with 41,000 people? That population would fit three times into a small Toronto riding and yet there is an impossibility of getting access to one’s elected representative in a region that is larger than western Europe. That is part of the fundamental principle of participatory democracy.

I have heard the argument that every vote should be weighted the same. My friend from Brampton West said that his vote should weigh exactly the same as Prince Edward Island. Just doing the math quickly, and my dad was great at math but I always got about 52%, that would give Ontario about 600 or 700 seats if we were to have the exact same representation by population as Prince Edward Island. Clearly, that is an absurd position.

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In my riding of Timmins—James Bay, for people to come to my constituency office from Attawapiskat would cost \$1,000 for the flight. There are no roads. If they want to see me in my office it is a \$1,000 flight while people from Brampton West could drive to the Toronto airport and go to Portugal for the weekend and come back for less than \$1,000. Are people who are able to drive to an MP's office somehow under-represented when there are members in the House who represent communities they can only get to once or twice a year?

When we talk about seat redistribution, which is a very important discussion to have with all members, we are talking about nation building. It has to be done right.

Unfortunately, I sense this is an attempt to have the idea of nation division here. When questions are raised about how the process is done I hear colleagues asking such things as, "What do you have against the people of Ontario and Alberta", as if that was the only question before us. That is obviously not the question. It is how we weigh votes and ensure not just representation by population but the ability of citizens in the country to access the participatory democratic system.

If we go with a simple model of representation by population, as I said earlier, we can erase Labrador with its 26,000 people. Manitoba ridings average 78,000 people. We will probably take a couple of ridings out of Manitoba so that it is more fair than the way that Brampton is set up. In Saskatchewan, with an average riding size of about 63,000 or 70,000, we could probably take out three seats. With regard to Yukon, we do not even need to talk about as there are only 30,000 people, so it would disappear. In my good friend's riding of Kenora in Northern Ontario there are 64,000 people. I would challenge anybody on the government side or the opposition side to try and represent those 64,000 people across the grand grass terrain of Kenora.

That is not to say that the addition of seats in urban areas is not an important aspect, but it is not the sole aspect. It is the issue of balance. When we are here as members of Parliament to talk about how we will find that balance, it is very disturbing to see this attempt to pit one region against the other.

I will speak to the issue of Quebec. In *Champlain's Dream*, the vision Champlain had was for Canada to be a place that would avoid the wars and hatreds that had consumed Europe. His original dream was to build a new society with the first nations. Unfortunately, we kind of blew that one somewhere along the way, but hundreds of years later I think we are starting to reconnect with the original dream of Champlain.

• (1245)

However, the founding of Canada in 1867 was really the coming together at that time of Upper Canada and what was then Lower Canada and the maritime provinces. We were all somewhat equal in that sense because we were a much smaller population. There was a fundamental recognition that even though there were a number of provinces at that time, there were two founding peoples. That was what the Canadian compromise was based on. That is how we build nations: by compromise.

I am concerned when I hear that Quebec's population representation is not going to drop; what the government is not saying is that Quebec's historic place in the House will drop. That is a fundamental difference, because if we are going to continue on this nation building exercise and if we recognize that there is a distinct Quebec nation in this country—and we have agreed to that principle—then we have to agree to the principle of historic weight in the House of Commons. There will be regions in this country that will grow faster, and that is okay, but the historic weight of certain regions cannot be lost.

• (1250)

That brings us back to Prince Edward Island. Poor Prince Edward Island always gets picked on whenever we talk about representation by population, because it now has how many senators and how many ridings? It is four, as I know. There are many people who say, "My God, there are more people living in Sudbury, and Prince Edward Island has four seats and four senators", but that is the historic compromise we made.

The rest of the country grew at an exponential rate and Prince Edward Island did not; however, there has never been a suggestion that those four seats from Prince Edward Island should be taken away, so Prince Edward Island will always maintain its historic weight, even as other regions have grown exponentially.

We see real growth right now in Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario, and we recognize, as the New Democratic Party, that there is a need to address some of those growing disparities.

As someone who represents a region that is bigger than Great Britain and represents communities with no roads, I do not believe that my area should be considered more valuable or less valuable than an area represented by someone elected in a large urban region. They represent very different realities.

The idea of nation building is based on compromise and on understanding each other. We have to agree with each other and say, "Yes, your reality and the people you represent in a smaller urban area are in some ways completely different from the reality that I represent, but we have to find the compromises".

This is why the New Democratic Party came forward with our bill, Bill C-312, that would address this issue of imbalance. I want to assure my colleagues on the government side that we take this matter very seriously. That is why we came forward with our bill.

Through our bill, we wanted to ensure that the new areas of British Columbia, the growing regions of Alberta and the growing urban regions of southern Ontario grew, but we also wanted to maintain the historic representation percentage of Quebec in the House of Commons, because that is part of our founding commitment to one another. It is not enough to say simply that whatever Quebec's population is, it will maintain some percentage in the House. That is not the balance of two founding peoples.

We are interested to see time allocation being used to get this bill moving quickly. We have not even had the census. I would like to see the population trends that the census could show us.

My hon. colleague from Nickel Belt raises the question of northern Ontario. I would argue that one reason we have political alienation in various parts of the country is that people do not feel as though they are represented. In northern Ontario we have very often felt politically alienated from the urban south. We have always considered ourselves, and have been considered to be, a colony of southern Ontario. We have felt that Queen's Park ends at Steeles Avenue. Anybody in northern Ontario will say that.

What added to the political alienation was the Mike Harris gang, and unfortunately many of them are sitting in the front row now. They are the front line of the Conservative Party. Mike Harris decided that the best way to have political representation was to just take a whole whack of seats out of northern Ontario; that would be representation.

Taking those provincial seats out of northern Ontario made it very difficult for people to be served by their elected representatives. We have seen northern Ontario's presence in the Province of Ontario continually diminish, to the point that when the McGuinty government made a plan over the last few years for the development of northern Ontario, its officials did not bother to come up to consult with anybody in any of the first nations. They were too busy.

I remember *The Toronto Star* asking what the problem was with all these first nations people and whether they did not trust the smartness of the Liberal government.

Those people were making decisions about lands that they did not even want to bother visiting. That is the sense of political alienation we have in northern Ontario. It occurs once we get north of Highway 17. With all due respect to my hon. colleague from Muskoka, although we get money out of the FedNor fund, we have always believed that northern Ontario starts at Highway 17. North of Highway 17 it is a completely different community, a different set of cultures, a different set of economic realities, yet as elected representatives from northern Ontario, we are tied to the population base of Ontario overall.

• (12:55)

When we see massive urban growth in regions around the 905 belt every time we redo the census, people begin to say that northern Ontario is somehow over-represented, because it is based on the population of southern Ontario, which is, of course, absurd.

I represent a riding with over 80,000 people. That would make mine a normal Manitoba riding or a big Saskatchewan riding. In New Brunswick or Newfoundland, it would be a very large riding. However, in Ontario it is considered over-represented and is perceived to have an unfair advantage over my colleague from Brampton, or whatever other suburbs are represented here in the House. That is not the reality.

New Democratic Party members want to address the need to deal with the changes in the House. However, we are very concerned with the Conservative government's attitude that it is right, that we should get with the program, and that if we do not like it, then it shows that

we are against Alberta or against Ontario. I do not know who it thinks we would be against next. That is not how we build a nation.

This change has been a long time coming. It can take some good debate, but it needs something more than debate; it needs some good will. Unfortunately, I find that is lacking in the Conservatives' approach.

I am more than willing to look at what would happen at committee with the bill, but my spidey sense is tingling. As I said earlier, I see a government that seems to be moving toward some manner of autocracy. It wants to limit debate on all manner of bills. The Conservatives seem to think that being given a majority on May 2 gives them the right to override the interests and concerns of other elected members of Parliament.

We think we need to have an improvement in the seat distribution, unlike the Liberal Party, which wants the status quo. That is their business, and I do not mind that, but I think we need to find a balance. If we are going to find that balance, we have to recognize that the number one principle is representation by population. However, my concern is that if it is solely representation by population, Canada would not work, period. We would have no balance whatsoever. We need to find that balance.

For example, if we added 15 seats to Ontario, all in the 905 region, we would certainly change the political makeup of the country, and this is a discussion that needs to happen. How is that going to play out? Is it fair? Does it unfairly affect the representation of Quebec? Are there enough seats given to ensure Quebec's historic status?

This is not about dividing; it is about asking straightforward questions. I think every member in the House is committed to the idea of fair democratic representation.

I used to live in Toronto—Danforth, the riding of my former leader, Jack Layton. I could walk 20 minutes either way to two MPs' offices. I saw it as normal for living in the city. I could walk up Danforth and see one MP's office and then walk along Queen Street, and there was another. However, as I said, when I hit the break week, I could probably put 3,000 to 5,000 kilometres on my car and still not visit all of my communities. Therefore, I find it a little rich when I hear someone tell me that because they represent a suburban riding, they are unfairly under-represented in the House.

If it is a question of resources, that is certainly a fair question. Is the caseload in an MP's office the issue?

This is another important element about northern Ontario. Most of my region does not have government services, as the government does not bother to come up into the James Bay coastal area. When I go up to Attawapiskat, Kashechewan or Fort Albany, I fill out health card forms because Ontario health services will not go there.

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It is funny: because of the risk of health card fraud, in Ontario one cannot have a health card without a photograph, but there is no place to get a photograph on the James Bay coast; as a result, the provincial government does not bother worrying about photos on the James Bay coast, because it does not want to bother servicing those communities. To provide services to them, I go up with my staff and the provincial member goes up with his staff, and we fill out health card forms and birth certificates, because there are no government services.

● (1300)

In rural areas, members of Parliament are not only seen to represent the political interests and the political will of the community, they are often the only front line. With the cuts to Service Canada and Service Ontario, our offices take on more and more caseload all the time. We do not have more resources to do it, which adds another question: what is the role of the member of Parliament?

Certainly we have a role to be here as legislators. That is our primary role. That should perhaps be our one role. We were elected to be legislators. However, with the continual shrinking of government services and community people falling further and further through the cracks, it is just assumed that if individuals go to their member of Parliament, he or she will fix it for them.

We spend our time having to do the front-line work of the federal government because the federal government does not bother servicing many of these communities. They are not adequately serviced by Service Canada. People are out of luck with EI claims if they do not come to our offices, and out of luck with immigration and passports. We are a passport service.

As legislators we are doing the work of government, because it does not want to spend the money. Its narrow focus is that we will just add 20, 30, 50, 60 seats to the House of Commons and everything will be magically balanced. That is not a realistic solution to the problem.

Number one, we have to ensure that our front-line services are there, because our citizens are looking to us not simply to come here and vote for them, but to represent them and be their face of government, because the face of government is not there.

It is not about pitting one region against the other, but about working together as parliamentarians. I certainly see the scowl on my colleague's face on the Conservative side. I am not surprised. They do not understand that unless members are in the autocracy of the Prime Minister, they are somehow against everything. They do not know the idea of balance and compromise. That is not how we build nations.

We are here. We have offered our own bill because we believe that the bill's plan can work. We want to make sure that we have maintained a historic balance, but we are very uncomfortable with the simple statement that we have to get to representation by population. If the Conservatives were serious about that, they would rejig the entire borders of Canada, and they are not going to do that.

We need to work together. I am putting out the olive branch to my colleagues, but I will be surprised if they take it. This is not the way

that we have done business. If the government worked with people, it would not have to shut down every debate that happens.

I am interested in what might come next, because over the last six years the government has bothered to complete pitifully few bills. Usually it prorogued and started over, and then government members would rant on about crime. Then the Conservatives would prorogue and start over. If they get all their time allocations, I am wondering what they will do. I imagine they would probably shut this place down and prorogue again.

We are interested in this issue, but we are certainly a little concerned about the government's attitude toward questions on the bill.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member's remarks with interest, but I have to disagree with him. The fundamental constitutional principle of the House is representation by population.

Prior to Confederation, it was not. In fact, between 1840 and 1867, under the Act of Union that created the Province of Canada, the principle was not representation by population. The legislature of that day was divided into two equal halves, administratively, between Canada East and Canada West. Each of those regions had 50% of the seats in the House, and as Ontario, or Canada West at the time, moved from being a very sparsely populated area to being a much more heavily populated area, the representation for Canada West went from being over-represented to underrepresented. That was perfectly acceptable in the context of the Province of Canada, for which this building and the original Library of Parliament was built.

In 1867, because the leader of the Liberal Party, George Brown, had argued for decades for representation by population, we went to a federal system of government with two sovereign orders of government. In the upper order of government, in the chamber that we sit in, it would be representation by population as a fundamental constitutional principle, and that has been reaffirmed by the Supreme Court of Canada in numerous rulings.

I encourage the members opposite to reconsider their position on giving any one provincial division a specific percentage of the seats in this House, because that violates this very important constitutional and democratic provision in the Constitution of Canada.

● (1305)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, that was very well argued. Maybe the member lives in a different Canada than I do, but Saskatchewan's seats are counted at some 60,000 people. If he wants to take three or four seats out of Saskatchewan so we can meet the demands of the Constitution, I say, good luck. If he wants to erase New Brunswick with 50,000 people per riding, he can go ahead and will see what happens. He may want to get rid of Labrador at 21,000 people or Yukon at 30,000 people per riding.

This idea that representation by population is the fundamental principle is absurd. This is a House that represents people based on various geographic and historic reasons. In terms of the English and Quebec identities, those have had weighted balances, which is why I go back to Prince Edward Island.

The member can talk about this grand myth of George Brown in 1867, but it has never been a practised reality in the House. If he wants to change it, he will see a pretty bizarre shift in terms of the seats we have.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was interested when my hon. colleague from Timmins—James Bay was talking about reaching out with an olive branch to other parties, and yet, at the same time, talked about our party's position as if it were the status quo. In fact, he used the words "status quo", saying that was our position. Those two notions conflict: that he is handing out an olive branch and yet totally misstating our position. In fact, we have not suggested the status quo at all. Perhaps he has not been able to hear all the debate or he has not been listening, but he ought not portray it differently than it is.

My colleague used the phrase "historic weight". I am from the province of Nova Scotia, which has 11 seats. It seems to me that having 11 seats out of 250 is not the same weight as having 11 out of 330 seats, as the government would propose. Does he think that is the same weight? Is that the same historic weight as my province had at Confederation, for example, or as it does now? That makes no sense to me at all.

When he talks about the alienation of people across the country, does he hear from people that the reason they feel alienated is because of an insufficient number of members of Parliament?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I am y sorry if my hon. colleague felt that I did not represent his position very clearly. I have heard so many different positions from the Liberals that I am trying to extend the olive branch by saying that it seems somewhere in the status quo, but I cannot go any further than that.

Do I hear about under-representation? Yes, I do. In northern Ontario, I hear about it all the time. I would invite the member to come to northern Ontario where people feel that they were written off the political map of Canada and that the Mike Harris Conservatives wrote them off the map of Ontario. That plan has been continued by Dalton McGuinty. I am aware of the issues of political alienation. It is the heart and soul of what has happened in northern Ontario because of the sense that we have not had proper representation.

I represent first nation communities and my constituents say, "You're our elected guy, the white guy from Timmins. You're 500 kilometres from our communities. Why is there no first nation representation?" It is because of the way we divide up our seats. There is no reason we cannot have a northern Ontario seat representing first nations. They are the only people who live north of 50 but they are not on the map. So, yes, I hear about political alienation. I hear about it all the time in my riding.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Timmins—James Bay for so eloquently bringing to this House the problems we face in northern Ontario.

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The last time there was a redistribution of ridings by population, northern Ontario lost one seat. For example, in order for my colleague from Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking to go from Algoma—Manitoulin to Kapuskasing, she must cross Nickel Belt, and now we are talking about making it bigger.

Earlier today, I asked the Minister of State for Democratic Reform if this would affect northern Ontario and he would not answer. I asked another Conservative MP the same question and I did not get an answer. Does my hon. colleague from Timmins—James Bay think this would affect northern Ontario and that our ridings would get even bigger?

• (1310)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to receive that question as I lived through the last seat redistribution in 2004.

My hon. Liberal colleague talked about people being angry about what happened to their seats. He should come up to northern Ontario. The riding of Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking was written by people who, obviously, had never been to northern Ontario. They did not understand the region. That riding is simply impossible to service.

I challenge any suburban member to go to the riding of Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking and try to cover it off. It is immense and spread out with no commonalities. The top part of her riding is 90% francophone and yet it is not connected in any way to the southern part of her riding, which is almost entirely anglophone. She must travel through two or three different ridings to get to the other part of her riding.

In my riding of Timmins—James Bay, Timiskaming was cut in half. Timiskaming was one region for over 100 years but someone decided that part of Timiskaming would go to North Bay and another part would go to Timmins. That line divided our francophone community and our agricultural community. It was done in a ham-fisted way. I heard this had to do with representation by population because some people down in Vaughan perhaps felt that they did not have enough seats.

What we are saying about balance is that we need to recognize the continuity of cultural and rural realities if seats are going to be redistributed so it is fair and so people have adequate representation. That did not happen in the last round and I would be surprised, given the government's attitude, that it would happen in this round.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Timmins—James Bay talked a lot about nation-building and now we are facing nation division.

He also mentioned two founding nations. As he well knows, the first nations were also involved with those two founding nations.

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Unlike the member for Wellington—Halton Hills, who cited George Brown, I would like to mention George-Étienne Cartier, who was the hon. minister of defence in Macdonald's government. Cartier's position is debatable among historians but, according to historian, Claude Bélanger, in accepting the compromise of 1867, several guarantees were sought and obtained by the provinces that feared they would be overpowered by other provinces. Quebec received a fixed number of seats and would serve as the basis of calculations for seats in other provinces so that as the country grew the historical weight would be maintained.

Could my hon. colleague speak to that again for the House?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, we need to recognize that our country's success has been built on the compromise that existed between Quebec and the rest of Canada, not between a whole bunch of provinces. If there were a whole bunch of provinces, we would not have our own distinct court system in Quebec. We recognize the French tradition in court. We recognize it in language. We recognize that right.

Ontario recognizes the right of francophones to have their own schools. That was a hell of a fight but it was based on the principle that we must maintain these historical balances, even as the other populations changed and as new Canadians came in. It is great. We love multiculturalism but, in Ontario, people have the right to get a francophone education in any community because these are the original compromises we made, and we are proud of them. That is why Canada is successful.

Mr. Parm Gill (Brampton—Springdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak on behalf of my constituents of Brampton—Springdale in support of Bill C-20, the fair representation bill. The bill fulfills our government's commitment to move toward fair representation in the House of Commons.

During the last election, we made three distinct promises to ensure that any update to the formula allocating House of Commons seats would be fair for all provinces.

First, we would increase the number of seats now and in the future to better reflect population growth in British Columbia, Ontario and Alberta.

Second, we would protect the number of seats for smaller provinces.

Third, we would protect the proportional representation of Quebec according to its population.

Our government will fulfill each of those promises with this bill, and I am very pleased about it.

Fairness in representation for all Canadians is an important goal. The vote of every Canadian, to the greatest extent possible, should have equal weight. This is a fundamental democratic concept and a key Canadian value. All citizens should have an equal say in who is elected to represent them in Parliament and in this House. It is important that we act to ensure we are moving toward that goal and not away from it.

The current formula for allocating seats in the House of Commons is outdated and does not meet the current needs of constituents in my riding of Brampton—Springdale and across Canada. The current

formula moves us away from fair representation a little bit each and every day. This problem is particularly serious in and around my riding of Brampton—Springdale. Directly to the west of my riding is the riding with the largest population in Canada, Brampton West. Directly east is the fourth largest riding, Bramalea—Gore—Malton. Within a 15 minute drive of my riding, I can reach seven of the ten largest ridings by population in Canada.

My riding of Brampton—Springdale was created in 2004. The census data from 2006 showed that Brampton—Springdale was the 13th most populous riding in the country.

All of those ridings, including my own, suffer from what the minister described as a representation gap and this representation gap must be fixed. The seat allocation formula that provides for new seats in the House of Commons every 10 years now dates from 1985.

Back in 1985, the members of the House decided on a formula that did not put a priority on fair representation. The formula we have now does not properly account for population growth. In fact, it is especially bad at dealing with large population growth in large cities in our largest provinces. My riding of Brampton—Springdale fits that description exactly. It has large population growth, is a large city and is in one of Canada's largest provinces, the province of Ontario.

Many of the ridings surrounding it also fit that description. Most areas surrounding the GTA suffer from the inability of the 1985 formula to properly account for population growth. The problem is not limited to the GTA only. The problem is seen across the country, especially in Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta. Because the existing formula does not compensate very well for large population growth, Canadians in our largest and fastest growing provinces are moving further away from fair representation.

I have said that this representation problem is especially serious in my riding and the area surrounding it. The minister agrees, as do many of my hon. colleagues in this House. However, what are the implications of the representation problem?

• (1315)

In March of last year, and last month, we were provided with evidence that describes the problem. In the report, "Voter Equality and Other Canadian Values: Finding a Balance", Matthew Mendelsohn and Sujit Choudhry wrote the following:

This problem is getting worse and, unless there is fundamental reform, will continue to do so in the future. Moreover, the character of voter inequality is changing.

They wrote that the combination of problems with the current formula and the high level of immigration increasingly disadvantages new Canadians and visible minorities. This is because many new Canadians choose to live in densely populated suburban areas, like my riding of Brampton—Springdale and the ones next to it. These are exactly the types of ridings which the 1985 allocation formula leaves under-represented.

Mendelsohn and Choudhry wrote:

[It] recognizes the new reality of Canada: that it is Canadians of multi-ethnic backgrounds living around our largest cities, particularly the GTA [greater Toronto area], who are under-represented, injecting a new dimension of inequality into our federal electoral arrangements.

More than 56.2% of my constituents are part of a visible minority group and of multi-ethnic backgrounds. Members can understand why the fair representation act would be greatly welcomed by my constituents. This representation gap needs to be fixed as soon as possible. Not only are my constituents becoming more under-represented, but they are becoming more under-represented much faster than Canadians in other parts of the country.

We need to follow the principle of representation by population as closely as we can, but the current formula does not do that. This is a serious problem that requires immediate solution. I think that Bill C-20, a bill that is applauded by my constituents, is that solution.

With the fair representation act, our Conservative government is delivering a principled and reasonable update to the formula to allocate seats in the House of Commons.

The bill would do a number of things. It would move every province toward representation by population in the House of Commons. As I have said, this is an important democratic principle that we need to be moving toward, not away from. It would address the representation gap by moving Ontario, British Columbia, and Alberta significantly closer to representation by population. This is important because this is where the most under-represented people are living.

Using the formula put forward in the bill, Ontario would receive 15 new seats, British Columbia would receive 6 new seats, Alberta would receive 6 new seats, and Quebec would receive 3 additional seats. The bill would increase seat counts for these provinces, both now and in the future, by ensuring that population growth would be more accurately factored into the seat allocation formula. In this way, the principle of representation by population would be followed to a much larger degree, which would be much fairer for all Canadians.

Not only would representation be better now, but it would also be better in the future. The representation gap would become much, much smaller and the fast growth of the problem under the current formula would be stopped. At the same time, Bill C-20 would ensure that smaller and slower growing provinces would maintain their current number of seats. This is only what is fair to those parts of the country, and it is reasonable and principled to maintain their effective representation in the House.

• (1320)

The legislation would also fulfill our platform commitment to maintain Quebec's representation at a level proportionate to its population.

It is important to highlight that this is exactly what we promised in the last election and this is exactly what we are delivering. We are keeping the promises we made to Canadians during the election campaign.

Quebec would receive three new seats, since the purpose of the bill is to move every single province toward representation by population in a fair and reasonable way. We are also being fair by making sure that the seat allocation formula would not move

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overrepresented provinces under the level which their population warrants. That would not be fair to those provinces and it would not be right for us to do that. This is in support of the principle of proportionate representation. It is another one of the fundamental principles in our democracy right alongside representation by population.

As I said, we are keeping our promises and we are keeping them in a fair and very reasonable way.

This bill would better respect and maintain representation by population. This bill would directly help under-represented Canadians, like the constituents in my riding of Brampton—Springdale, and in many other ridings in the GTA and elsewhere in this country.

This bill would ensure the effective and proportionate representation of all provinces, especially for smaller and slower growing ones. This bill would have national application that would be fair for all provinces. As the minister said, all Canadians from all backgrounds in all parts of the country expect and deserve fair representation. This bill would provide that in a very principled way.

Since we are talking about fairness, I would also like to talk about accuracy. After all, using the best data available to us is fair. This bill would ensure that when allocating seats to each province, the best data available would be used. This would ensure that Canadians are fairly represented. Instead of using the census population numbers, Statistics Canada's annual population estimates would be used. These estimates work to correct for some of the under-coverage in the census, and they provide the best data for the total provincial population. In that way we would make sure that Canadians in the faster growing provinces would be getting the representation they deserve.

This change would assist in making sure the growing representation gap was closed sooner rather than later. This would be especially helpful for people in ridings like mine and the many other faster growing ridings across Canada.

In Bill C-20, we are also maintaining the independent process that draws the riding boundaries in every province, and making sure that process also has the best data available for its purpose, too.

The readjustment of the electoral boundaries would be done using the census data, as it always has been done. Why is the census data best for this job? The census provides a population count street by street and house by house. This accuracy is necessary to most properly draw the new electoral boundaries and is the best data available for the job.

There would be no change to that aspect of the process, which has been the process since 1964. It will remain fair, impartial and independent. There would be some changes to streamline the process, however.

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● (1325)

We want to make sure that the new seats and boundaries are ready for the next election so that Canadians get the fair representation they deserve as soon as possible. If we wait too long, Canadians will have to go for another decade or longer with worse and worse representation. That is not acceptable, so we will not allow that to happen.

In conclusion, this bill, the fair representation act, is a principled update to the formula allocating House of Commons seats. It is fair. It is reasonable. It is principled. It would solve an important problem that needs to be fixed and which will only grow worse if we fail to act for all Canadians. It would achieve better representation for faster growing provinces where better representation is strongly needed. It would address and correct the under-representation of many new Canadians in large suburban ridings like my own. It would also maintain effective representation for smaller and slower growing provinces. The fair representation act would deliver these things and would deliver on our government's long-standing commitments.

I hope that we can pass this sensible and good piece of legislation as soon as possible. The vote of every Canadian should have equal weight to the greatest extent possible, and we cannot delay that. The constituents in my riding of Brampton—Springdale expect that from us and we need to deliver.

● (1330)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened attentively to the member's speech. As he knows, there has been some concern about the different formulas the government has introduced through the various manifestations of the bill which we have seen in the last couple of Parliaments. Different formulas have been brought forward each time. That is something we have raised concerns about. Our critic for democratic reform, the member for Hamilton Centre, has raised the issue of the government's use of differing formulas each time it introduces legislation.

The member spoke very eloquently, but obviously we have some concerns. I am from British Columbia and as the formulas have come forward, B.C.'s representation has actually gone down. As the member is aware, British Columbia is one of the least well represented of provinces. We have a handful of seats in the Senate and that is why the NDP has been strong in calling for the abolition of the Senate. We are just not represented there.

I am wondering if the member could address the issue of the differing formulas and the fact that B.C.'s representation has gone down as each of the different formulas has come forward.

Mr. Parm Gill: Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out that during the past couple of Parliaments under minority governments, we not only had challenges with this piece of legislation, but we also had challenges with a number of other pieces of legislation.

However, in the last election, Canadians clearly gave us a very strong mandate to represent them here in the House and as the population changes and the numbers in the provinces change, we have to update the formula. The formula in the bill is the best one under the current circumstances. It is the best representation we

could have in the House based on population and considering all the different dynamics of the provinces and their makeup.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the things I like about the bill is that there are three truly unique positions being taken inside the House. The Conservatives are saying they want to increase the number of seats quite dramatically, by 30. The New Democrats are agreeing that the number of seats should be increased, but they believe that rural representation and the votes of people in those areas are of greater value than those in urban areas. I believe that a vast majority of Canadians would suggest that the biggest thing lacking in the bill is whether there is a need to increase the number of MPs in the House of Commons.

Why not redistribute based on the same number seats that are here? Why not look at the possibility of sticking with 308 seats? Why do we have to increase the numbers? The vast majority of Canadians would not necessarily support the increase nor is it necessarily warranted. It is one of the reasons that we should be having this debate, but unfortunately, as the member knows, the government is only allowing a couple of hours of debate in total on the bill.

Mr. Parm Gill: Mr. Speaker, after the next election in 2015, assuming the bill passes through the House and Senate, there will be an additional 30 members

I encourage the member to go into some of these suburban ridings, such as my riding of Brampton—Springdale, or other ridings in other parts of the country and speak with Canadians who are affected by this, who have raised their voices and have asked why they should be under-represented, especially the visible minorities and new Canadians who choose the suburbs to call home when they immigrate to Canada and bring their families with them. They are unfairly under-represented. They feel neglected. They do not deserve that.

That is one of the things we are looking to fix with the bill. It is those visible minorities, new Canadians and Canadians of all walks of life right across the country who have raised their voices. When I attend events, I constantly hear about this in my ridings and in the surrounding ridings.

● (1335)

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member represents one of the largest ridings in country. In fact, that region in the GTA, the Brampton and Bramalea ridings, consist of some 500,000 people. Not only is it a large riding, but it is a very fast-growing riding and is one of the most diverse ridings in the country.

Could the hon. member elaborate on the importance of this legislation, specifically in his community, as it relates to new immigrants, new people who move into the riding?

Mr. Parm Gill: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his hard work in the House on behalf of his constituents. He is from Richmond Hill and understands the problem we have in the GTA. This problem is huge. I hope my colleagues, hon. members in the House, would realize the extent of this problem.

The riding directly west of my riding of Brampton—Springdale has a population of over 150,000 people. The riding east of mine has over 130,000 people. Within a 15-minute drive from my riding, I can probably reach about eight to ten of the ridings with the largest populations in the country. Especially new immigrants, visible minorities who live in the suburbs in the GTA area are affected by this and have made their voices heard. I and other members of the House of Commons are here to represent them.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is telling us just how important the changes proposed in Bill C-20 are for his riding. That is indeed the change that will be made to his riding, but what about my riding and the other 74 ridings in Quebec? There are two sovereignist parties and two federalist parties in the Quebec National Assembly and they are all clearly saying that the political weight of Quebec must not be reduced. We are not talking about demographic weight, but about political weight.

My question for the hon. member is very simple. What does he think of the motion adopted here in 2006 that recognizes Quebec as a nation? What does the Quebec nation mean to him?

[English]

Mr. Parm Gill: Mr. Speaker, I point out that the Conservative government is very responsible and is concerned about all Canadians, regardless in which part of the country they may live.

I talked about Brampton—Springdale because I am responsible for representing it. However, I used that as an example. There are examples such as Brampton—Springdale all over Canada. That is the reason we are adding 15 new seats in Ontario, 6 new seats in British Columbia, 6 new seats in Alberta and 3 new seats in Quebec. Under the bill, I feel this is the best formula we could have.

I am very thankful and I appreciate the hard work the hon. minister, the Minister of State for Democratic Reform, has put into the legislation. I would encourage all opposition members to support the bill and its speedy passage as soon as possible.

● (1340)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the very talented, eloquent and hard-working member of Parliament for Edmonton—Strathcona and I look forward to hearing her speech on the bill.

This is a technical bill that has ramifications for the whole country and I am pleased to rise to speak to it. It is something we have expressed concern about before. In the time I have, I will give a bit a background to the bill itself and the issue of seat redistribution in the House of Commons.

As members are well aware, this has been part of the growth and development of Confederation and Canada. Over time, we have tried to maintain a couple of principles in the House of Commons. One is to ensure that provinces with fast-growing populations get more representation. At the same time, we have also had a tradition in the House of Commons of providing support and a floor level representation from regions across the country. That floor has been the story historically for Atlantic Canada, and I will come back to that in a moment. It creates some differences, but it is something that

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Canadian accept as part of the nation-building exercise. That type of floor has also been in place for the territories.

Members who have had the opportunity, as I have, to travel to the northern territories know they are vast areas of Canada. Unbelievably large portions of our three northern territories do not meet the population criteria of the House of Commons, but clearly Canadians believe those areas of the country should be adequately represented. Therefore, we have put floors in place for them as well.

This has been the development over time. The nation-building exercise has always been to look at those two components and ensure that both the historical representation and the floors for ensuring clear representation and adding additional seats come into play. What has developed over time is that system of great Canadian compromise and nation-building of working on both aspects to ensure Parliament's representation is clearly representative.

I come from British Columbia and it has historically grown faster than its representation in Parliament. When we look at the figures, clearly there is a need for increased representation in British Columbia.

Coming back to what I mentioned earlier about Atlantic Canada. My riding of Burnaby—New Westminster, because there are many new Canadians who are not yet Canadian citizens and are who not on the voters list, has a population of about 120,000 or 130,000. That is slightly under the population of Prince Edward Island. Historically, P.E.I. has strong representation with four seats in the House of Commons. The system of ensuring historical representation for areas that are faster growing has always been part of the dynamic in play. There is no doubt that British Columbia needs additional seats.

In my riding of Burnaby—New Westminster and the riding of Newton—North Delta, the number of constituents is very great and there needs to be more seats in British Columbia to ensure that B.C. is adequately represented and members of Parliament can properly represent their constituents.

● (1345)

As we know, the job of being a member of Parliament is far beyond speaking in the House of Commons and having other members listen attentively. The job of being a member of Parliament for the most part is in the riding. As members of Parliament are intervening on behalf of their constituents with federal agencies and federal ministries, the machinery of government sometimes does not work effectively. Members of Parliament are there to ensure that our constituents are fully and adequately represented and we go to bat on their behalf.

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If we have more members of Parliament in British Columbia, that means we can focus on slightly fewer constituents and ensure that we do that strong, necessary advocacy work on their behalf with the federal ministries, federal agencies and on federal programs where constituents may have applied, or intervened or made application and were not treated in the fair and just way that they should have been. We are advocates first and foremost. Therefore, having those additional seats plays an important and key role.

That is where we get into some difficulty and have some concerns with Bill C-20. In looking at how the various iterations of the bill have played out and the various formulas that have been applied, we have gone through three different formulas to calculate representation in British Columbia. What we have seen in B.C.'s case is a smaller number of seats through this process. That is of some concern, not so much the fact of having a seat in the House, because even that is an important aspect of our work, but having that representation out in the community and being able to effectively represent and advocate on behalf of the 120,000 or 130,000 constituents, which is a different order than advocating effectively on behalf of 110,000 or 115,000 constituents.

That is very clearly where seat distribution and MP distribution in the House of Commons comes to play. It makes a fundamental difference when we have that balance and we have those additional seats. Because we have seen the various iterations and the number of additional B.C. MPs brought down, this is where I see some real concerns about the latest formula that has been brought forward at this time.

Members may say that the bill will go to committee. Certainly, we on this side of the House have always been ready to work with the Conservative government in a way that we expect it to work with us. One day the NDP will be in government and the opposition parties will get the opportunity to see not only lively debate but what healthy, transparent, effective representation and working with opposition parties will bring. There is no doubt that many Canadians look forward to that date in 2015 when the NDP steps forward.

Our concern is the practice of the government in committee has not been good to date. It has often bulldozed and steamrolled opposition parties rather than listen to the healthy points of view that we bring forward, particularly on this bill.

This is a nation-building exercise. This is a point which shows how the government and we as Parliament respect all regions of the country. It talks to the historic representation of Atlantic Canada and the northern territories. It talks to the historic and important representation of Quebec that we have brought forward in our bill. It points to the representation of Saskatchewan and Manitoba despite population changes there. As well, it points to additional seats in places such as Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia.

We have brought forward and supported legislation for the healthy, nation-building establishment of a consensus. We certainly hope the government will start listening, consulting and really working with the Canadian public and with opposition parties so a bill such as Bill C-20 can appropriately be part of a nation-building exercise. To date, that has not been the case, but I hope the government will change in this regard.

• (1350)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, this is nation building legislation. It is legislation I would like to support. I regret very much the limitation on debate, which has made it difficult for smaller parties to be part of the debate and discussion.

I would like his thoughts, though, on whether we can continually, in the future, beyond the bill, add new members to the House of Commons every time we see Canada's population grow. At some point do we not have to bite the bullet and go back and revisit those areas with sparser populations?

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I think there are two parts to what the hon. member is asking.

First is the issue of seats in the House. Can we keep adding members to the House of Commons? I would like to say that in other parliaments on this globe there are no seats, there are benches.

As I have mentioned earlier, the important work that members of Parliament do is not so much the speaking. I certainly do not need to have this desk. I can sit on a bench, and stand and speak. It is what we do in our ridings across the country, serving our constituents that is absolutely vital.

The important aspect of additional representation means that there are more members of Parliament to advocate strongly on behalf of their constituents. If they are not advocating on behalf of their constituents, they do not deserve to be in the House.

The second component she raises quite rightly is the issue around rural-urban representation, and certainly on this side of the House, the NDP has always seen this as a very important, careful, national building exercise.

That is why we have talked about seats for Quebec. We have talked about seats for areas like my province of British Columbia along with Alberta and Ontario. We have talked about ensuring a floor for Atlantic Canada and the territories. This is a nation building exercise and that means rural representation being adequate and effective in the House of Commons as well as urban representation in the House.

Hon. Lynne Yelich (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member talked about representing constituents and that it was the most important part of his job. If he believes that, then last night when two members voted for the wishes of their constituents on the long gun registry, why would his party punish them if coming here and representing their constituents is first and foremost after being in the House, as he suggested?

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, this party takes no lessons from Conservative members who have not, since they were elected, stood up on behalf of their constituents a single time.

Government Orders

We have seen with the Canadian Wheat Board that a promise was made to consult with farmers across western Canada and the Conservatives broke that promise cruelly after their election. They promised farmers a consultation on the Canadian Wheat Board and on May 2 they said, "To heck with western farmers. We will not consult them. It does not matter if 60% of western farmers want to keep the Wheat Board, we will do away with it".

I respect the member, but there is not a single member in this House from the Conservative Party who has done anything on behalf of their constituents on issues like the Wheat Board and the gun registry. Time and time again, the Conservatives betray their constituents. That is unfortunate and it is wrong.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the member in terms of the Canadian Wheat Board. The government has not been listening to what our prairie farmers have been saying.

Having said that, with regard to Bill C-20, does the NDP have any limit as to what it believes the size of the House of Commons should be?

Today, it does not have a problem with 338 which is being proposed by the government. Do the NDP members have an optimum number, or do they see this as a thing in progress, that as the years go by, the House will just continue to grow and grow?

• (1355)

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member had been to Britain, he would see that its House of Commons is a smaller House with twice the number of members. The House of Commons in Britain has simply done away with desks. We can sit on benches. We can vote from benches. We can speak adequately on behalf of our constituents, but the most important issue is representing an advocacy on behalf of our constituents.

If there are more members of Parliament doing that work on behalf of their constituents, and certainly that is the case on this side of the House. That is one thing that NDP MPs do very well, which is why we have grown from 19 to 29 to 36 to 103. We did that because we have been very strong and effective in advocating for our constituents.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for graciously sharing his time with me. It is regrettable that we could not have heard more of his eloquence.

It is my pleasure to rise to speak to this bill. Nobody believes more in representation of constituents than I do. As well, nobody believes more strongly than I do that we have a responsibility in this House to ensure that we are actually representing the interests of all Canadians no matter what corner of the country they come from, no matter their diversity of background, and no matter their interests.

I just want to be clear, on the record, that there have been falsehoods reported by some of the members on the other side, to the public and the media in the past, that I would oppose additional seats for Alberta if there was going to be a seat distribution based on population. I have never said such a thing and let us just make it clear in the House today that if the only decision is based on representation by population and if we do that in the true way we

should, based on a census, clearly my province of Alberta, and I am very proud to be a third generation Albertan, would have fair representation, and then there would be duly more seats for Alberta.

Our party in this House has said time after time, on the basis of what we have heard from our constituents and what we have heard from Canadians across this country, that Canadians want a more democratic system of federal governance. What we see from the government is little pieces here and there, an elected Senate that frankly is not representative. Now it wants a changed seat distribution based on what? It has three formulas and we are not sure what on earth the government is basing that on.

It is an important decision for our future. It is an important decision if we are going to incur further costs. Having heard from my constituents, I have to say very honestly that this has not been a priority issue in my riding. I do not think I have ever heard from a constituent demanding that we make the House of Commons larger. What they demand is that we better represent their interests in Ottawa and that we bring the federal government back to Alberta more often so we can actually hear from it directly.

Yes, we need to ensure we have fair representation in this House of Commons, but what does that mean? We have heard from some of my colleagues and they have said that we need to balance off the representation by population with the representation by region, and the representation by other undertakings and agreements that we have made in this House, including to Quebec, to our territories and to the maritime provinces.

I want to point out that if the Conservative side of the House truly believes that we need to make this move to provide fair representation to everybody in Canada, we need to recognize that 23 of 28 ridings in Alberta voted, as their second choice, New Democrat. My riding voted for me as their choice and so it is also important to keep in mind that even in our first past the post system, there are many interests that are not represented unless all of us in the House bend over backwards to ensure that all those perspectives, all of those voters, are being heard in committee and in this House, and that we reach out to them and ensure we hear from everyone, not just the ones who happen to step up to the plate and vote for us.

Should the decision for adding seats in this House simply be based on representation by population? We have heard many arguments stating that possibly that is not enough. If we look at the historical formula, it is not simply based on representation by population, it is also based on a certain percentage to Quebec, and to recognize, as the Prime Minister previously said, "Quebec as a nation within a unified Canada". That was the decision made in consultation between the Prime Minister of the day and the leaders of all the provinces and territories.

I agree with my colleagues who have spoken on this and asked, where is the consultation with the premiers? Where is the consultation with the leaders of first nation governments? The government always likes to stand up and say it is representing the best interests of first nations people. Should they not be heard directly through their leaders as well?

Statements by Members

● (1400)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona will have five minutes remaining when the House returns to this matter.

Statements by members, the hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS*[Translation]***ROGER BÉLIVEAU**

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I wish to express my heartfelt congratulations to Roger Béliveau, of Warwick, on being inducted into Quebec's agricultural hall of fame.

For 50 years, Mr. Béliveau has owned a dairy farm along with his wife, Rita Jolibois, and their sons. He has earned an excellent reputation within the Quebec farming community. Mr. Béliveau has been active on several boards of directors for nearly 40 years and has made a mark particularly within the Coop fédérée, Agropur, Warwick Salt and Olymel. He was president of the Coop des Bois-Francis for six years.

As a mentor for members of the young farmers group, the Association des jeunes ruraux du Québec, he is also passing on his passion for agriculture to the next generation of farmers in our region and across Quebec. Mr. Béliveau has definitely earned this recognition. It is thanks to people like him that Quebec has become so renowned for agricultural excellence. Thank you, Mr. Béliveau, and keep up the good work.

* * *

*[English]***URBAN ENVIRONMENT**

Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to rise in the House as the member for Winnipeg South Centre. Today it is my honour to recognize the dedication and generosity displayed by many of the families in my riding.

Winnipeg is famous for the elm trees that line its streets and boulevards, but elm trees need to be protected from Dutch elm disease.

A number of years ago families in my community started protecting those trees. These were concerned families, true leaders in community engagement. Now the youth of these families have taken over from their parents and these young people are learning valuable skills as entrepreneurs and philanthropists.

On behalf of all of my constituents, I would like to thank and to honour these young men and women for all of their hard work. The future is indeed in very good hands.

*[Translation]***FOOD BANKS**

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in my beautiful riding of Hochelaga, people working at food banks—Cuisine collective Hochelaga-Maisonneuve, Bouffe-Action de Rosemont, Chic Resto Pop, CAP St-Barnabé, Maisons Adrianna and Centre NAHA—devote themselves body and soul to helping feed their neighbours. There are also community gardens and fresh fruit and vegetable cupboards at HLM Boyce-Viau, HLM La Pépinière, Jardins Guybourg, Petit marché de l'Est and Marché solidaire Frontenac.

Despite all the hard work, there is not enough healthy and affordable food, especially in winter. In poor neighbourhoods, food is less readily available, of poorer quality and more expensive. Convenience stores abound. There are four food deserts in Hochelaga.

In a rich country like Canada, why is the health of so many adults, children and seniors compromised because they do not have access to healthy and affordable food while the owners of banks and big oil companies make billions of dollars in profit? Something is not right.

* * *

*[English]***UKRAINE**

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, recent events in Ukraine have brought to light an unfortunate reality.

With the arrest and conviction of former prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko, we are witnessing an erosion of democracy and human rights in Ukraine. The court showed bias and was politically influenced.

For the last number of years, the government of Ukraine has been waging a campaign to smother political dissent, freedom of speech and freedom of the press. The result has been the intimidation and imprisonment of academics, journalists and human rights advocates.

Despite the abrasion of the rule of law in Ukraine, there is reason for optimism.

This year, 35 members of Parliament were fortunate enough to host Ukrainian interns in the Canada-Ukraine parliamentary program. These bright young interns represent a vibrant, principled future for Ukraine.

I had the privilege to speak with these future leaders, and they have demonstrated an unparalleled desire to learn and educate themselves about Canadian democracy and society.

I have no doubt that they will return home and lead Ukraine to a brighter future.

* * *

● (1405)

FAMILY DOCTOR WEEK

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the occasion of Family Doctor Week in Canada, I want to acknowledge the critical role of family doctors in the health care of Canadians.

I would ask all members to join me in celebrating the College of Family Physicians of Canada's annual family medicine forum currently taking place in Montreal, as well as the Family Physicians of the Year for 2011, including Dr. Philip Hébert from Toronto.

In June we lost the brilliant Dr. Barbara Starfield whose research proved that health care systems, where 50% of the physicians are family physicians, are the most cost-effective and provide the highest quality of care.

It is unacceptable that many Canadians do not belong to a family practice. The federal government must take strong leadership as soon as possible to ensure that there are no more orphaned patients in Canada.

BURLINGTON TEEN TOUR BAND

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today, I stand to honour a very special group of young Canadians from Burlington, Ontario.

The 180 person strong Burlington Teen Tour Band is known as "Canada's musical ambassadors" and is one of Canada's most decorated, awarded bands internationally. They have performed at the Rose Bowl, for the president of France, at the 50th anniversary liberation ceremony in Holland and on the beach for D-Day anniversaries with our veterans in Normandy.

This fall, the Burlington Teen Tour Band will represent Canada at Pearl Harbour in Hawaii to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the attack. It will be the only non-American, non-military band to participate in this significant anniversary event.

I, the citizens of Burlington and all Canadians are proud of these young people.

On behalf of all members of Parliament, we want to wish the Burlington Teen Tour Band a very safe trip and thank them for being great ambassadors for Canada.

RICHARD HYNDMAN

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Albertans are mourning the passing of Dr. Rick Hyndman, who brought great wisdom and civility to Canadian energy and environmental policy discourse.

Rick contributed to climate change and air pollution policy at the Alberta Department of Energy, the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers and the Canada School of Energy and Environment. He lectured on economics and business at the University of Alberta.

I will greatly miss our friendly but opinionated debates on his back porch about the most effective means to reduce carbon emissions.

In honour of his work, the friends of Dr. Rick Hyndman are establishing an entrance scholarship in energy, environment and public policy for the MBA program at the University of Alberta, School of Business.

In Rick's own words:

Statements by Members

Canada's advantage over competing energy resource basins should be a high-quality policy framework. For this we need thoughtful, fact based, public policy. I hope these scholarships contribute to making Canada's energy sector the positive force that I have always believed it could be by giving future business leaders and government officials the skills to contribute positively—

The Speaker: I will have to stop the hon. member there.

The hon. member for Brandon—Souris.

GEORGE DOW

Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honour and pay tribute to Dr. George Dow who passed away on August 18 of this year.

Dr. Dow served as a physician in the town of Killarney and district for over 40 years, retiring in 1999. Most of his career was spent in a small community medical practice and, as such, he was always available to his patients all the time.

Dr. Dow also served as the medical examiner for the region for many years. For his dedication and commitment to his community, he was named physician of the year in 1990 and awarded a life membership by the Manitoba Medical Association in 1999.

Although Dr. Dow was very busy in his practice, he was also an active volunteer, giving his time to many organizations, including the building committee for the Tri-Lake Health Centre and the new Killarney United Church. Dr. Dow also served as a councillor, a mayor and school trustee, and, in July of this year, he received his 60 year service award from the Masonic Lodge.

George loved hunting, fishing, golfing, curling and reading, but, most of all, he loved his family. He is survived by his wife, Ruth, children Anne and Edward, and three grandchildren.

ROBERT WILSON WIGHT

Mr. John Carmichael (Don Valley West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today, I stand in this House to recognize a friend and World War II hero, Robert Wilson Wight.

Mr. Wight saw action following D-Day in northern Europe, including Holland, Belgium and Germany. During the war, he served as a platoon commander, a commanding officer in the demolition platoon and as an officer commanding A-Company.

Bob left the Canadian army in 1953 as a major and wanted to be remembered as a "front-line infantry officer in WW II".

Bob and his late wife, Gertrude, were married for 65 years and were proud of their family, who are visiting Ottawa today.

Bob passed away at the George Hees veterans residence at Sunnybrook Health Science Centre in my riding of Don Valley West, and it is no coincidence that he died on June 6, 2011, the 67th anniversary of D-Day.

As we approach Remembrance Day next week, I ask all MPs to join with me in recognizing this great Canadian veteran.

Statements by Members

● (1410)

[Translation]

MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Charlotte Côté and Camille Desrochers-Laflamme, two individuals I greatly admire for their social involvement, came to my riding office to give me a petition asking the Government of Canada to fully participate in meeting the millennium development goals.

These young students from École d'éducation internationale de McMasterville took the initiative to start this petition and collected no less than 450 signatures as part of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty on October 17.

By so doing, on this important day of social mobilization, they joined other students throughout Quebec in working to combat poverty and in drawing the attention of world leaders to the importance of achieving the millennium development goals.

I would therefore like to recognize the social commitment demonstrated by the students at École d'éducation internationale de McMasterville and their efforts to eliminate poverty in Quebec, in Canada and throughout the world.

* * *

[English]

CANADIAN FORCES

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, July 2011 marked the end of Canada's combat mission in Afghanistan. While the combat mission has come to an end, the Canadian Forces continue to play an active role in training their Afghan counterparts.

The past 10 years have brought about many changes for Afghanistan. Afghanistan has held three elections, government agencies have been improved, its economy has gained momentum, girls are going to school and the Afghan security forces have been provided with invaluable training and mentoring.

One hundred and fifty-nine Canadian Forces members have made the ultimate sacrifice to help Afghans obtain a taste of the freedoms that we hold so dear, tragically, joined recently by Master Corporal Byron Greff, of Edmonton's Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry.

In addition to Afghanistan, Canadian Forces are serving in 15 overseas missions, including Libya, Haiti, and Sudan.

At home, they save lives during search and rescue missions, provide assistance when natural disasters strike, and protect our nation's sovereignty on a daily basis.

This Veterans' Week, let us remember the service and sacrifice of our Canadian Forces members and their families.

"To live in the hearts of those we leave behind is not to die".

[Translation]

CANADIAN PARKS AND WILDERNESS SOCIETY

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, or CPAWS, is Canada's voice for wilderness. Since it was created in 1963, it has played a crucial role in protecting over 45 million hectares of Canada's wild spaces—an area nearly seven times the size of Nova Scotia. Its vision is to protect at least half of Canada's public land and water—forever.

More and more, we are all looking for ways to conserve nature for future generations. Conservation issues go beyond political lines. CPAWS is able to create a consensus that we can all get behind.

I urge all my colleagues in the House to join me in congratulating the large number of CPAWS representatives who came to Parliament today. We encourage them to continue to protect our ecosystems. Congratulations, CPAWS.

* * *

[English]

IMMIGRATION

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Centre-North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been 10,000 permanent residents admitted through the Canadian experience class, which our government introduced in 2008 to attract and train international students and skilled foreign workers.

Our Conservative government also announced that it would accept up to 1,000 PhD students per year as permanent residents through the federal skilled worker program.

These announcements were praised by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, as well as the Association of Canadian Community Colleges. Even our NDP immigration critic has praised these announcements.

The Conservative government's number one priority remains the economy, and we will continue our efforts to retain the best and brightest talent in the world to ensure Canada remains competitive in the global economy.

These initiatives represent what we hope is part of the future of immigration to Canada: bright, young people who have a Canadian education or work experience. Such newcomers are set for success.

* * *

● (1415)

HEROISM

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in times of crisis, ordinary people can become super-heroes, performing feats of extraordinary valour.

Last Thursday was one such day in Richmond, B.C. when Thunderbird Air flight 204 crashed with seven passengers on Russ Baker highway during an emergency approach to Vancouver International Airport.

Without thought for personal safety, people leapt out of their cars and off their bikes to pull the seven passengers out of the burning plane, stopping only when the heat and flames made their work impossible. Their unselfish and prompt response saved the lives of every passenger on board. Unfortunately, the veteran pilot perished and the co-pilot suffered 80% burns and is in critical condition.

Stories like this cut through the cynicism that afflicts our daily lives and reaffirms our faith in the humanity and kindness of strangers. I would ask the House to rise with me and salute the Richmond heroes.

* * *

NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a member of the non-partisan review committee, the NDP House leader infuriated his colleague from Acadie—Bathurst when he signed off on the nomination of Supreme Court Justice Moldaver, and yet, when a parliamentary committee met to question Justice Moldaver on October 19, the NDP House leader quickly changed his tune. He attacked Justice Moldaver after he committed to learning to speak French, claiming he had heard the same commitment from Justice Rothstein in 2006.

When confronted on those facts, he could not prove them and the NDP House leader recanted and alleged that it may or may not have come from confidential interviews in which he was involved.

Beside the fact that he cannot prove what he alleges, the NDP House leader is also attempting to reveal moments of confidential interviews that he had agreed not to divulge. This is yet another worrying example that the disunited NDP is not fit to govern.

* * *

[Translation]

MINISTER OF PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Public Safety launched an attack on defence lawyers. John Diefenbaker was a defence lawyer and successfully defended 18 people who were facing the death penalty. But according to the minister, he should have been ashamed of choosing to make a career of defending criminals. The member for Kitchener Centre is also a defence lawyer. Justice Moldaver, whom the Conservatives recently appointed to the Supreme Court, was also a defence lawyer. According to the minister, those two people are guilty of choosing a shameful profession.

[English]

After the 1999 Manitoba election, the Minister of Public Safety was charged with breaking election laws and he hired a defence lawyer to plea bargain for him. Was he at least grateful then for lawyers who choose to defend criminals?

The minister brought shame on himself, his government and the House with his ridiculous remarks attacking our country's defence lawyers. He should stand and apologize.

Oral Questions

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday, 156 members stood in their place and voted to end the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry. We were doing what we told our constituents we would do.

At first, we wondered why members, like those for Western Arctic and the NDP leadership contender for Skeena—Bulkley Valley, did not join us. Now we know why. The NDP members and party insiders told the media that two of the members who voted to end the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry have been severely punished by the NDP. When the NDP boasts about silencing its members, it is no wonder it is so worried about floor crossing.

Luckily for the constituents of the silent northwestern Ontario MPs, Conservatives like myself will be their voice for our beautiful region. When the opposition chooses their big union bosses over the people who sent them here or even their own MPs, it is further proof that they are not and could never be fit to govern.

ORAL QUESTIONS

● (1420)

[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Public Safety launched a full frontal attack on defence lawyers in this country. The irony is that the government's misguided prison agenda will see provinces shelling out for more prisons, for more already overworked prosecutors, and yes, for more defence lawyers. The only thing we will not see is more police officers on the street to prevent crimes.

When will the government stop saddling the provinces with these costs and actually deal with them to make sure that we prevent crimes before they ever happen?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the question is when is the hon. member and his party going to start listening to the NDP government in Manitoba that supports these measures to keep Canadians safe?

The member talks about a full frontal attack. It is that member who yesterday launched a full frontal attack on the integrity and credibility of a member of the Supreme Court of Canada, fabricating commitments at a confidential hearing which were never made. That member has been repudiated by Mr. Justice Rothstein. Will he stand in his place, apologize and retract his irresponsible remarks?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, order. The hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): I will just ignore that, Mr. Speaker.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]*

The Conservatives' imprisonment plan is the wrong approach. It ignores the concerns of local stakeholders who, for decades, have been fighting crime, working to rehabilitate young people and keeping our communities safe. The Government of Quebec was very clear: if Ottawa passes this bill, it should not count on Quebec to pay the bill.

When will the Conservatives finally work with Quebec to combat crime?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP will continue to ignore the victims of crime.

For example, the New Brunswick Attorney General said that her government supports, without hesitation, the efforts to strengthen these legislative provisions in order to protect victims of crime, protect our children and give victims a voice.

However, the hon. member cannot ignore his attack on the credibility of a member of the Supreme Court of Canada. Will the hon. member apologize and retract his irresponsible remarks with regard to the integrity of Mr. Justice Rothstein?

[English]

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will continue to ignore that.

It is not just the province of Quebec that is opposed to these costs.

[Translation]

Ontario, British Columbia, Manitoba, Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island have also made it clear that they oppose the government's expectation that they will bear the costs related to this program. In all, that is over 75% of the country's population.

Why is this government ignoring the opinions of these provinces? What does the government plan to do if the provinces simply refuse to pay the bill?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government will continue to act in the interest of crime victims and Canadians, just as it is acting in the interest of the 77% of Quebecers who said that they were in favour of tougher sentences for criminals.

However, for the third time, I will give the hon. member the opportunity to retract his irresponsible remarks that attack the integrity of a member of the Supreme Court. We must respond to this member's false statements.

When will he apologize for attacking the integrity and credibility of a justice of the Supreme Court?

[English]

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after hearing yesterday's scandalous personal attack on my New Democratic colleague by the Minister of Public Safety, I would hate to hear what names he is calling the five premiers of the provinces who are saying no to this bill. These provinces know how to keep communities safe.

Newfoundland and Labrador's justice minister said he has never seen a study favouring more jail time as a way to improve public safety.

Why will the out of touch government not support the provinces' efforts to invest in crime prevention and more police officers? Why is it burdening them with billions more in costs for a failed approach?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today we heard from the mayor of Winnipeg who indicated that naysayers of Bill C-10 are sitting idly by while more innocent people are being murdered. He said that the rights of citizens need to trump the rights of criminals in our country.

I want to repeat the challenge of the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism to the member across the way who slighted the reputation of a Supreme Court of Canada judge when he breached a written confidential undertaking that he made to the people of Canada. Will he apologize?

• (1425)

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the provinces are not buying what the minister says about costs. Newfoundland and Labrador's justice minister said that past social transfers are not sufficient to cover the costs of these megaprisoners. Premier Ghiz in P.E.I. said that if the federal government wants to increase costs for the provinces, it should pay the bill.

Provinces are refusing to write a blank cheque for the government's prisons agenda. Will the government help the provinces pay for crime prevention, or will it bully them into paying for a plan that has been a proven failure elsewhere?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear with respect to the NDP. Even spending a dollar on fighting crime would be too much for the members of the NDP.

That being said, with respect to the provinces, I see the province of Manitoba, through its attorney general, said, "Because we called for many of the things that are in there", he is talking about the bill, "we're hoping that the law gets passed and we can get on with it". Marie-Claude Blais, the attorney general of New Brunswick, said, "This bill will help to better protect our children".

Why will the New Democrats not get with it and start helping us to fight crime in this country for a change? When are they going to get—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Toronto Centre.

* * *

*[Translation]***AUDITOR GENERAL**

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is a serious flaw in the process that was used to appoint the Auditor General. The government announced that the position was a bilingual one and that official bilingualism was an essential qualification for the position. The *Canada Gazette* used the phrase "proficiency in both official languages".

Why does the government keep insisting that there are no problems with the basic process used in this appointment?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the process encouraged bilingual Canadians to apply and all candidates were considered. It was determined that the person selected had the best skills of all the candidates. And that is why Sheila Fraser, the former Auditor General, said, “He will be a very good auditor general. He is very capable, a very nice person and I think once parliamentarians get to know him, they will appreciate him.”

[English]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is not about the agreeability of the person in question; that really is not the issue. The issue is that the government set out in a written announcement with respect to the posting of a public position, an officer of Parliament, that the position required official bilingualism. It required a capacity in our two official languages in order to be able to hold the job. That was set out as a fundamental characteristic of the post.

The Conservatives then changed the rules at the end of the game. Since when is it fair or reasonable to do that? It is not. It is whimsical, arbitrary, capricious, and it is wrong. It is illegitimate, and the government should know it.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate to see the leader of the third party attacking an officer of Parliament who has been a faithful public servant, whose candidacy has been supported even by Mr. Victor Boudreau, the interim leader of the Liberal Party of New Brunswick.

I would remind the leader of the Liberal Party that when he was here as a member of Parliament for the NDP, Pierre Trudeau appointed Ken Dye as one of our greatest auditors general in modern Canadian history. Mr. Dye was a unilingual Canadian.

We do not believe that Canadians who do not have perfect fluency in both languages should be excluded from serving their country.

[Translation]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I still see a problem here. First, when the minister clearly states that I have attacked someone, he should know—and I am looking straight at him—that he is not telling the truth. We are not opposed to the individual in question. We are opposed to the government's position and how it made this choice. It broke its own rules with this process. The minister should see that there is a problem here. It creates a problem for the entire Canadian public service when the government changes the rules like that. That is the problem.

• (1430)

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if there is a problem here, it is the credibility of the leader of the Liberal Party. Professor Donald Savoie at the Université de Moncton said, and I quote, “What surprises me is that the leaders of the opposition parties immediately cried foul. If they had concerns, they should have voiced them when they were given the opportunity.”

Oral Questions

All the Liberal members have refused to vote against Mr. Ferguson's appointment. We believe in equal opportunity and we do not want to exclude Canadians who are not perfectly—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Europe has been rocked by the threat of an economic disaster that could have significant repercussions in countries everywhere, including Canada. Canadians are afraid of losing their jobs, a record number of families are turning to food banks and there are record levels of inequality. Almost two million people are unemployed, but there is no real plan to create jobs that will sustain the economy.

My question is simple: when will this government finally take action to help these Canadian families?

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we have said over and over, we have a plan. The NDP voted against our plan. This plan will help the economy and our Canadian families. I am referring to phase two of Canada's economic action plan. I wonder why the NDP is refusing to vote with us to create jobs. We have created 650,000 jobs since July 2009.

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what is clear is that slow growth means fewer jobs for Canadians. Yesterday, the Parliamentary Budget Officer said we should expect another 100,000 Canadians to lose their jobs next year. The Governor of the Bank of Canada said that the economy is slowing. These are individuals with more credibility than the government has.

The Conservatives are clearly taking Canada down the wrong track. When will the government admit it does not have a plan, adopt the sound economic suggestions of this side of the House, through the NDP, and act now to protect family-supporting jobs to avoid 100,000 more unemployed people?

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was at that meeting yesterday. I heard very clearly what the PBO had to say. I heard very clearly the other day what the Governor of the Bank of Canada had to say. It was very clear that the PBO said that he makes mistakes. Why did he say that? There was a report in *The Globe and Mail* recently which said very clearly that the PBO is less accurate many times over the government estimates, which are private sector, independent economists' estimates. The government is 9 times out of 15 more accurate.

We are going to stick with our low-tax agenda. We are going to help families. Whether or not those members vote for it, we are going to do the right thing.

Oral Questions

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about mistakes. From May 2008 to today, the Conservatives have created barely 250,000 jobs in this country. It is not the numbers they advance, not the bogus mistakes that they put forward.

Before the Conservatives start to celebrate, the reality is that over the same period of time, the labour market grew by 450,000 jobs. This means they are 200,000 jobs short from treading water, from standing still. That is very unfortunate for Canadian families.

Given that their numbers are bogus, given that they are going to lose another 100,000 jobs if they do not act, why do the Conservatives not get to work now so that Canadians can get back to work?

Mr. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what we have to resist is that \$10 billion tax hike the NDP has proposed that would kill jobs, that would negatively impact Canadian families. Let us not forget that the IMF and the OECD have been very clear that this is and will be the country in the next five years in the world to do business.

We are going to continue with the plan we have because that is giving us the advantage in the world. That is going to help Canadian families. We are not going to succumb to the punishment of the NDP on our Canadian families by voting for higher taxes and killing jobs.

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, families are finding it harder to get ahead. Household debt is the highest it has ever been. The average Canadian family owes \$1.49 for every dollar it earns.

The Conservatives have no plan. When will we see measures from the government that will help struggling Canadian families?

• (1435)

Mr. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we clearly are concerned about Canadians overextending themselves. However, I have to ask myself, and I ask the NDP to respond to this eventually, why is that when we put as a priority of our government things like the financial literacy plan where we are setting up a financial literacy leader in the government to improve that situation, when we introduce credit card reforms, when we strengthen mortgage rules to protect Canadians who are buying a home and when we cut taxes and create things like the TFSA, which is an incredible advantage to Canadians, the NDP always votes against them?

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the truth is we voted against billions in corporate tax cuts. We voted against the inaction of the government.

[Translation]

Household debt has reached record levels and families continue to pay the price.

The problem is that instead of helping households make ends meet, the Conservative government continues to give large tax cuts to big business, which does not really create jobs. If that is their plan, it just does not work.

When will this government finally help families crushed by debt?

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, our government's priority is primarily to meet the needs of our Canadian families. For that reason, we are anxiously watching current world events. We are hearing more and more that events affecting Europe, and the United States may affect us also.

That is why we must continue with our plan to freeze taxes for families and maintain jobs. To that end, we must follow our plan to help employers create jobs for Canadian families.

* * *

G8 SUMMIT

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, before the committee yesterday, the President of the Treasury Board tried in vain to put out the fire that is raging regarding the G8 scandal.

The problem, however, is that his statements raised more questions than they answered. The hon. member for Parry Sound—Muskoka told us, for example, that without any intervention on his part, the 242 projects initially presented were somehow whittled down to 32, as if by magic. There is no paper trail of any kind on that.

Can the President of the Treasury Board finally explain to us what criteria he used to choose those 32 projects?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday two ministers and three deputy ministers spent two hours before committee and answered all the questions of the members of the committee.

The Auditor General has confirmed that all the money went to public infrastructure projects, and every penny is accounted for.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we learned yesterday why the President of the Treasury Board is never the one to answer in this House.

Let us review the facts. The President of the Treasury Board signed contribution agreements; he even created a nice homemade form. He met with local officials and helped select the projects. His constituency office even intervened to make sure those projects got money.

Does anyone still really believe that the President of the Treasury Board was not involved in this scandal?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what the President of the Treasury Board did, what I did and what three deputy ministers did yesterday was respond to every question the members of Parliament on the public accounts committee had. The member opposite had the opportunity to ask those questions.

This has been thoroughly looked at. The Auditor General looked at it and came forward with some helpful observations. We fully accept that advice.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the problem is that yesterday the Muskoka minister presented a defence based on the claim that 242 pet projects magically became 32 pork projects, without any paper trail and without any involvement by him whatsoever.

However, on April 20, 2009, the town of Gravenhurst stated that it was told by the Muskoka minister to "remove the centennial project from the G8 fund and he would find the money elsewhere".

The committee asked him a direct question. Why did he not disclose his direct involvement in the selection of that project?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General spent considerable time looking at the issue. She came forward with a report. She made some very good recommendations to government on how we could be more open and more transparent to Parliament. We have completely accepted that advice.

Yesterday there were two hours' worth of hearings on the issue where every question was answered.

• (1440)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General said the rules were broken and the rules were broken by him. Therefore, if the government accepted the Auditor General's advice, he would be bounced out of his seat. That is a simple fact because the documents show he directly intervened and he told the committee otherwise. Either he has misled committee or he has a really bad memory.

Either way, what is that man doing in charge of \$250 billion of taxpayer money?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General has looked into the issue. The public accounts committee has spent a good amount of time examining the issue.

Yesterday two ministers and three deputy ministers responded to every question that the committee had, and all the questions have been answered.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Foreign Affairs admitted that he always knew that the \$50 million he asked Parliament to approve for the border infrastructure fund would actually go to projects in Muskoka instead. The minister admitted that he topped up the fund by 166% in order to hide his Muskoka gravy train from both Parliament and the Auditor General.

The minister makes jokes about this, but breaking the rules and wasting tax dollars is no laughing matter. Will the minister take this opportunity to apologize to Canadian taxpayers for this abuse of power?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I spoke to this issue when the Auditor General released her report. I spoke to this issue at great length at committee. I certainly would commend *Hansard* from that committee to the member opposite.

[Translation]

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Foreign Affairs confirmed that \$50 million that had been earmarked to improve border infrastructure was used to finance projects proposed by friends of the member for Parry Sound—Muskoka. Furthermore, he told us it was simply a matter of a small adjustment, when in fact, he increased the funding by 166%. This scheme was meant to distract parliamentarians and the Auditor General.

Why does the Prime Minister not reprimand his ministers for this flagrant abuse of their fiscal authority?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it will not come as any surprise to my colleague opposite that I reject much of the premise of the question he just asked. Yesterday we fully laid out, as we have in the past, the facts involving the Auditor General's report and answered every question members at committee had.

* * *

CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the member for Peterborough is not busy pretending to be the Pope, he tries to instead impersonate a federal court judge.

He and other Conservative members of the access committee are trying to seize documents concerning the CBC's business dealings, even though these very documents are before the courts as we speak.

Will the Minister of Justice explain our Constitution to the member and how it mandates a strict separation between the courts and Parliament, or is he a part of this abuse of power as well?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join with my Conservative colleagues, but disappointingly not opposition colleagues, in commending the member for Peterborough for demanding accountability at the CBC. This is something that our government said that we would do.

The truth is the CBC receives a lot of money, and our government has been clear. If it is to receive that money, then it needs to be accountable for it. That is what the committee is investigating and that is what the member for Peterborough is standing up for.

* * *

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday we learned that Industry Canada delayed the F-35 project for over a year because it was not happy with Lockheed Martin's work. This government is arguing with its own experts. Another day, another problem with the F-35 project. The costs of this program are astronomical and our pilots' safety is at risk.

Will the Minister of National Defence finally recognize that the F-35 program is simply a disaster?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our participation in the joint strike fighter program continues to be a success.

The end result of this complex process is successfully ensuring that Canadian industry benefits from the enormous opportunities provided by this program. It is ensuring our Canadian Forces have the best aircraft they need to protect our sovereignty by land, sea and air now and well into the future.

Though we are still in the early stages, Canadian companies have already secured \$370 million in contracts, supporting industries that employ 80,000 Canadians.

• (1445)

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if the government truly believed in economic spinoffs, it would require equivalent economic investments throughout the country, which it has not done. The government's F-35s are not safe and are not adapted to the realities of Canada's north. The costs are soaring without any guarantee of economic spinoffs.

When will the government do its homework, face the facts and opt for an open and transparent bidding process that works for Canada?

[English]

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from the hon. member, which provides yet another opportunity to highlight the fact that the F-35 provides the Canadian Forces with the best replacement for the aging CF-18 aircraft and provides an excellent advantage in defending Canadian sovereignty.

The F-35 program is progressing well and on track.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as the son of an RCAF veteran of the Second World War, I can assure the House and all Canadians that neither that minister, nor that minister and nor the government have a monopoly on support for our troops.

We will keep challenging reckless behaviour of the government on the F-35 file precisely because it fails to support our troops, because of years of delay, because it cannot handle the Arctic and it has a poor safety record and because that out-of-touch minister would rather blow billions on planes that do not fly than admit he is wrong—

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. Associate Minister of National Defence.

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the reality is much of the work that has gone into developing what is state-of-the-art fifth generation aircraft that will look after our needs well into the future has come directly from the airmen, the people who fly the aircraft and the technicians with whom I have spoken who know first-hand. They say that this is the best aircraft at this time and well into the future for Canadian needs, Canadian workers and Canadian industry.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is a remarkably surprising answer. Yesterday we

learned that the government attacked its own officials over its botched F-35 deal. Government experts were so concerned over the contract with Lockheed Martin that they blocked the deal for a year, but Conservatives refused to listen.

Enough is enough. This dispute hurt the Canadian aerospace industry. Just how far is the minister planning to go to save face? When will he finally admit he is wrong and put the contract out to tender?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unlike the opposition's renewed interest in the Canadian military, Canada's first defence strategy represents a tangible commitment to provide our military men and women the resources they need, including the F-35, resources that will ensure mission success, personal safety and jobs for Canadians.

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FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): Mr. Speaker, just yesterday there were reports calling for the government to compromise on Canadian rights by backing down from our legitimate WTO challenge that seeks trade fairness for fishermen?

Could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and for the Asia-Pacific Gateway advise the House whether the Conservative Party really is the only party in the House willing to stand up for our international trade rights and the rights of fishermen to choose their own livelihood?

Mr. Randy Kamp (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it really is disappointing that the only Liberal spokesperson we have heard from recently is a Toronto senator who opposes the seal hunt.

We are a little worried about the NDP members as well, because their self-appointed Newfoundland fisheries critic claimed that the seal hunt is doomed and has said that we would be better off if commercial hunters retreated.

In the face of this affront to our fishermen and sealers, we stand emboldened in our resolve to defend Canada's international trade rights.

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PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, according to the annual Corrections report, under the government's watch, things are getting worse in Canadian prisons. Our prisons are more crowded than ever. Offenders with mental health problems are simply put in solitary confinement with no access to treatment programs.

Conservative mismanagement is putting Corrections staff at risk and leading to more violence in our prisons.

When will the government stop with these photo ops and actually address these serious public safety concerns?

• (1450)

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians gave our government a strong mandate to keep our streets and communities safe. Part of that means assuring that offenders are rehabilitated when in prison. That is why we have made historic investments, improving mental health in the correctional system.

In fact, I am proud to note that the International Corrections and Prison Association recognize this work with its leadership award for Canadian Corrections.

[Translation]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, all we hear from this government is rhetoric, with no regard for the facts. Here are the facts: access to rehabilitation programs is key to helping ex-convicts reintegrate into society. Yet these programs represent only 1.8% of the total budget of Correctional Service Canada.

Why does this government refuse to make public safety a priority by ensuring that prisoners have access to rehabilitation programs?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would invite the member to receive a briefing from Correctional Service Canada to indicate the steps that we have been taking, concrete steps on the issue of mental health in prisons. Both access to treatment services for inmates and access to training for staff have been vastly improved under this government.

I must point out that these increased resources are a result of the strong leadership of our Minister of Finance and our Conservative government.

* * *

[Translation]

VETERANS

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in less than 48 hours, Pascal Lacoste will begin his hunger strike in the hope of receiving treatment. Despite the government's refusal to recognize that he was poisoned, Canadian Veterans Advocacy has said that it is plausible that a number of Canadian soldiers were poisoned after being exposed to depleted uranium. Time is running out. Instead of passing the buck to his officials, the minister needs to act now.

Will the minister finally tell us what the government intends to do to help this soldier?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I told the member for Québec, our veterans and military personnel go through very difficult experiences when they are deployed.

As Minister of Veterans Affairs, it is my duty to do everything in my power to ensure that our veterans have access to all the services and programs they deserve. And this must be based on the latest scientific data.

Oral Questions

I urge veterans to avoid putting their health in danger and to accept help from our professionals so that we can continue to provide the services and programs our veterans deserve.

[English]

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in February 2000 the current member for Edmonton East said in a motion that he presented to the House that the government should take a leading role in banning depleted uranium from the world's militaries because of its harmful effect on veterans and our environment.

If the current member for Edmonton East, a Conservative member of Parliament, knows that, then why does the government not know it? As the Minister of Veterans Affairs knows all too well, he alone can apply the benefit of the doubt to help people like Pascal Lacoste and many other veterans who are suffering the effects of depleted uranium.

Will the minister do that now, before November 11?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member that we are implementing the newest and most recent scientific evidence. I praise the member for Edmonton East for raising those important issues and for raising \$200,000 for the returning veterans who took part in the campaign in Italy.

I invite every veteran who is putting his or her life at risk in such a case to get in touch with our skilled professionals, who will ensure they get all the programs and benefits to which they are entitled and which they fully deserve. We will stand by our—

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. member for Wascana.

* * *

TAXATION

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with the world economy in turmoil, it is no time for complacency. Standards of living are flat, disposable incomes are stagnant, household debt is high and the gulf between the very wealthy and everyone else is widening.

To make Canadians less vulnerable and to encourage growth, will the government forgo its \$1.2 billion EI payroll tax increase, allow 10 million low-income Canadians to access tax credits now reserved for only the better off and help seniors whose RSPs have been devastated in the stock market? Will the government do those three sensible things?

Oral Questions

● (1455)

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge that we are cautiously optimistic with the news coming out of Europe. However, it is interesting to find the Liberal Party standing up and talking about tax credits and helping people like our seniors and our most vulnerable. When we talk about our volunteer firefighters tax credit, I remember firefighters begging the Liberal Party, when it was in government, to do something, and it did absolutely nothing, so I will take no lessons from the Liberals on how to improve a credit they denied them for years.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, here is a lesson: it is to stop raising taxes and killing jobs. On the government's watch—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The member for Vancouver Quadra has the floor. We will hear the question.

The hon. member for Vancouver Quadra.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, on the government's watch, job creation is declining quarter after quarter. According to leading economists, the few jobs being created are almost all low-paying, part-time, or temporary. In fact, today Canada still has over half a million fewer full-time jobs compared to August 2008.

Given this sad situation, why is the government hurting private sector job creation with a whopping EI payroll tax increase, an almost \$2 billion burden in the last two years?

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I found it interesting when the member mentioned raising taxes. Was it not the Liberal Party, in its platform, that wanted to put a carbon tax on everyone—all Canadians, vulnerable or not?

That said, let us give the facts and the accurate statistics. Statistics Canada's facts are clear: 650,000 net new jobs have been created since July 2009, 90% of those have been full-time jobs, and 80% of them are in the private sector. This is a wonderful story, and we are going to tell it again and again.

* * *

[Translation]

AUDITOR GENERAL

Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this morning, by approving the appointment of a unilingual auditor general, the Conservatives once again showed their contempt for bilingualism. They ignored all the concerns raised by the NDP and francophones across the country. Although the government claims that Mr. Ferguson was the most qualified candidate, he does not speak French. How will he be able to do his job?

Will the Auditor General conduct investigations only in English and ignore all the French documentation?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we have already said, the government looked for bilingual candidates. I said that yesterday. Upon completion of a very rigorous process, the most qualified

candidate was chosen. Mr. Ferguson told a House committee and the Senate that it is important to learn French, that he wants to learn French and that he is going to learn French.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government is still hiding things from us. We do not yet know whether the candidate was asked any questions in French during the interview. Yet, the job posting in the *Canada Gazette* clearly indicated that the candidate had to be bilingual—that proficiency in both official languages was essential.

Why is the government still trying to suggest that the appointment was based on merit and that the candidate selected was the most qualified? The candidate does not even meet one of the hiring criteria. Is this what bilingualism means to the Conservatives?

[English]

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I absolutely reject the premise of that question. The person who chose to be considered for this position is absolutely the most qualified. This individual was given a battery of questions and tests. Sheila Fraser, the former auditor general, has endorsed his candidacy. Others who have been involved with him in the New Brunswick legislature have endorsed him, including the opposition Liberal leader.

He is the best candidate, and we stand by this appointment.

* * *

● (1500)

FEDNOR

Mr. Bryan Hayes (Sault Ste. Marie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada proudly announced new funding for the cyclotron medical research facility in Thunder Bay. This \$4 million investment will go towards creating long-term jobs in that great city and will help to bring private sector investment to a growing high-tech industry in northern Ontario.

Can the minister responsible for FedNor please rise and give an update to members on this important investment?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the Conservative member for that question. The member for Sault Ste. Marie is doing some excellent work in his riding.

Indeed, the government did make that important investment in the last budget. Unfortunately, the member for Thunder Bay—Superior North and his party voted against that worthwhile project twice.

Of course, we will not be hearing from the member for Thunder Bay—Superior North here in this House, thanks to the heavy-handedness of the NDP in disciplining that member. Members heard it here first. However, his constituents can count on us to represent them. We will do the right thing.

VETERANS

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Remembrance Day approaches. The Conservatives are commemorating this occasion by cutting more than \$200 million in funding to Veterans Affairs and axing more than 500 jobs. They suggest that the cuts will be absorbed through attrition, which is false, and by calculating the mortality rate of veterans, which is offensive. The ombudsman says that new vets are outpacing the death rate of older vets.

No one believes the minister except the echo chamber around him. When will Conservatives stop their assault on veterans and exempt the department from cuts?

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is out in left field—a potato field, I suppose—because the echo that is reverberating from one end of the country to the other indicates that our government has made a variety of improvements over the past six years: it introduced the new veterans charter, set up the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman and resolved the agent orange issue. Never have we invested so much in our veterans and we will continue to do so because we love our veterans and we believe in them.

* * *

[English]

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans' response to the potential discovery of infectious salmon anemia has been slow and inadequate.

There is a potential catastrophe unfolding on the Pacific coast, and the government is still weeks away from having confirmation from the CFIA. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans has a mandate to protect wild salmon. In all other jurisdictions where ISA has been found, it has had devastating consequences.

When will the minister finally take action and test these salmon?

Mr. Randy Kamp (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can assure my colleague that we are taking this issue very seriously because our government places a high priority on the good health and management of our fish stocks.

That is why in recent years we tested over 5,000 wild and farmed B.C. salmon. There was not a single case of confirmed ISA in B.C.

At this time, the reported findings to which the member refers are not conclusive. Federal officials are conducting tests in our certified ISA lab to verify these claims.

Instead of using unsubstantiated claims to undermine an important Canadian industry, I encourage this member to wait for the test results.

Oral Questions

POLITICAL DONATIONS

Mr. Jay Aspin (Nipissing—Timiskaming, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians deserve politics in which special interests do not have special access to political parties.

We already know that the NDP received at least \$85,000 from big labour unions for its recent convention in Vancouver. Added to that, the secretive NDP Federal Council met behind closed doors to set the rules for the NDP leadership race.

Can the Minister of State (Democratic Reform) please update the House on the status of removing big money influence over political parties?

Hon. Tim Uppal (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his hard work in this regard.

Every day Canadians are expected to pay back loans under strict conditions, and we should expect the same from politicians.

Our government has committed to removing big money influence over our political parties. That is why we reintroduced the political loans accountability act. The act will reduce undue influence of big money, including big unions, in the political process.

We encourage the NDP, its national council and its leadership candidates to live up to the spirit of this reintroduced legislation. Canadians deserve politics in which special interests—

• (1505)

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord.

* * *

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the employment insurance transitional measures and the pilot projects are essential to my riding and other regions. Even the Conservative candidate who was defeated in my riding in the last election, who is now the Conservatives' spokesperson for eastern Quebec, is calling for the recent pilot projects to become law. By refusing to take action, the Conservatives are abandoning the workers of Charlevoix and Haute-Côte-Nord.

Will the minister listen to the NDP and his own employees and extend the employment insurance transitional measures and pilot projects?

[English]

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government's top priority is getting Canadians back to work and promoting job growth and job creation.

We are committed to timely services and proper access to our systems for all Canadians. While there are seasonal fluctuations and changes in services, we know that Canadians need access to modern services.

Business of the House

Our government is focused on providing excellent value for taxpayers' dollars, unlike the NDP, which wants to raise our taxes. Why do NDP members not want to modernize our system?

* * *

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, from 1913 to 1956, a period of over 40 years, time limits on debates were used 10 times. In the last 40 days, a time limit has been used seven times, making a new historical record.

What used to be the exception to the rule appears to now be the rule.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Ms. Elizabeth May: I am only sitting because I cannot be heard.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. We will hear the rest of the question.

The hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the government House leader. Can we again restore a parliamentary tradition that limits on debates occur when matters are urgent or otherwise justified and do not become routine?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the last election Canadians gave us a strong mandate to deliver on jobs for Canadians—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, order. The House wanted to hear the question and I am sure the House wants to hear the answer. The Chair wants to hear the answer.

The hon. government House leader.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, Canadians asked us to deliver on tackling crime, on creating jobs for Canadians, on restoring the democratic principle of each vote having equal value on a range of commitments, and we are delivering on those commitments.

But what has happened each and every time is that the opposition has brought in a motion to stop debate, to say those bills should not go to committee, they should not go past second reading.

We will not stand for that. We will deliver on our commitments and ensure that the House has a chance to decide and debate these issues thoroughly at every stage.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of His Excellency Vu Trong Kim, General Secretary and Vice President for the Central Committee, Vietnam Father Land Front.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

[Translation]

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of His Excellency Halim Benatallah, Secretary of State to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, responsible for the national community abroad, for the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the hon. Marie-Claude Blais, Attorney General and Minister of Justice and Consumer Affairs for New Brunswick.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER**ORAL QUESTIONS**

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, you deliberated over whether “lemon” and “blueberry” were unparliamentary language. I would like you to consider the word “potato” as well. On many issues, the Conservatives' carrot-and-stick approach will come back to bite them.

• (1510)

[English]

The Speaker: Perhaps it would be best to avoid any reference to fruits or vegetables in general. They do not seem to be helpful to the debate.

The hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh on the Thursday question.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): It being Thursday, Mr. Speaker, and a Thursday before a break week when we will all be back in our riding commemorating events around Remembrance Day on November 11, I would like to ask the government House leader what the agenda will be for the balance of this week and what it will be in the week when we return? In particular, will Bill C-18 be back in the House by that time?

Finally, perhaps as a follow-up to the question asked by the member from the Green Party, how many more times are we going to have time allocation? We are at seven and counting. He is going to catch the Liberals pretty soon if he does not stop, so how many more times do we get time allocation?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, nobody would be more delighted than I if we could actually not have to use time allocation, but so far we have not seen an indication from the opposition parties that they are prepared to deal with bills on an expeditious basis. We feel the need to actually get things done here and deliver on our commitments.

In fact, in each of these cases since we started in September, each one of those bills continues to be debated in the process in the House of Commons. At committee, they have not even returned here for report stage yet, let alone third reading. Extensive debate is taking place.

The fact is that the parliamentary process is a lengthy one with many stages. We want to ensure that bills have an opportunity to get through those stages so they can become law, so we can keep the commitments that we made to Canadians.

We are making good progress this week, democratic reform week.

[Translation]

We introduced the Political Loans Accountability Act, which will prevent future leadership contestants from bypassing the law's contribution limits by running up huge interest-free loans from supporters. We saw this in the 2006 Liberal leadership race. Many of those loans do not get paid off and are really donations over the legal limit.

[English]

We have also begun debate on Bill C-20, the fair representation act. I am pleased that this bill will be voted on tonight before being referred to committee for study. The bill restores respect for the founding principle of our country at the heart of Confederation, that Canada's first Prime Minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, forged, that of representation by population. The bill moves every single province closer to the principle of representation by population, that each vote should have, to the extent possible, the same weight.

I know that some members may be disappointed that we have not yet had an opportunity this week to debate Bill C-7, which is the Senate reform act, but they can rest assured I will be calling that bill for debate as our first item of business on the Monday following constituency week. It is part of what one opposition member properly calls our comprehensive democratic reform plan.

[Translation]

Tomorrow, I hope we can deal with Bill C-16, the Security of Tenure of Military Judges Act, and Bill C-15, the Strengthening Military Justice in the Defence of Canada Act. I hope both bills, which make important revisions to the military justice system, will garner all party support.

Of course, next week is a constituency week where members will be in their ridings speaking to Canadians about the issues that are important to them.

[English]

I know that most Canadians, whom I have spoken with at least, think that the jobs and economic growth issues are the top priority and they expect their government to focus on that right here in the House. With this in mind, the next week that we are back will be a jobs and economic growth week.

Jobs and economic growth week will kick off on Monday afternoon when we will again debate the copyright modernization act. The opposition introduced a motion to keep this bill from ever being debated at committee. This is disappointing. The bill would

modernize our copyright laws and encourage job creation in one of Canada's most dynamic and important sectors of the economy.

I understand that the finance committee is meeting later today to conduct its clause-by-clause consideration of Bill C-13, the keeping Canada's economy and jobs growing act, that implements the next phase of Canada's economic action plan. I will give priority to this job creation bill when the committee has completed its study. I anticipate scheduling report stage for Tuesday and Wednesday, which will undoubtedly be the highlight of jobs and economic growth week. This bill would implement important measures from our low tax plan for jobs and growth, including tax relief for small businesses that create jobs and a new tax credit for children who go to dance classes or take arts, music, or language lessons. I hope that it will pass swiftly through the House so that the measures can be implemented for the benefit of our economy and indeed all Canadians.

● (1515)

[Translation]

Finally, Thursday, November 17, will be an allotted day.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, yesterday something very irresponsible happened in the House.

[English]

In that regard, we need to give the House another opportunity to give unanimous consent to the following motion. I move that notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, the House give leave for the member for Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Béancour and the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands to speak immediately, after this motion is adopted, on the subject of veterans and their sacrifice and contribution to building a better Canada in light of the upcoming Remembrance Day observances across the country, that those two members be granted leave to speak for a period not exceeding five minutes each, and that time taken by the two members at the conclusion of their statements be added to the time provided for government orders today.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh have the unanimous consent of the House to move this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

FAIR REPRESENTATION ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-20, Fair Representation Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Government Orders

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, where was the consultation with Canadians on fair representation measures before we ever had a bill tabled in the House? Our side of the House has been calling for years for dialogue across Canada. My constituents have been calling for decades for the government to sponsor a dialogue across Canada on ways that we can provide more democracy at the federal level.

Instead, we get these very narrow bills being tabled on electing a Senate, which, by the way, does not provide equal representation, and now seat distribution simply on population when, in fact, an agreement between a former prime minister and the leaders of the provinces and territories had agreed on a different formula, which included representation by population and recognition of Quebec's contribution to Canada.

If the model in this narrow bill, which the government brought forward, is truly to be representation by population, what is the rush? Surely, if we are to fairly represent provinces such as mine where we have a booming economy, why do we not wait for the 2011 census this coming February? That would give us the accurate information.

My province and my constituency continue to have more Canadians and immigrants move in daily. I sign off certificates monthly congratulating new Canadians. What is the rush? Surely we can wait a few more months. If the government is so convinced that the way to have fair representation is based on population, then let us genuinely base it on population not on projections.

The historic compromise, which was mentioned by a number of members in the House, was that we should have representation by population but that we should also have representation by region. If we look at the bill brought forward by the government, it is not a true representation by population bill. As other members of the House have mentioned, we would be taking members out of the House from some of the very regions whose contributions to the House we honour. They provide a rich contribution to the dialogue in the House and the making of federal legislation and policy.

It is time to step back and actually have a dialogue with Canadians. Many of my constituents have been calling for proportional representation. Why is that? It is because every vote, every interest, every priority and every perspective should count.

I feel strongly that I represent every constituent in my riding whether they voted for me or not. I think it is incumbent that we have a system that represents that. If people have other perspectives in my riding, they have a right to be heard directly as well. Therefore, it is time to stand back from these narrow kinds of bills, which, frankly, the government is not even delivering on, which is representation by population.

The Prime Minister of Canada has said that we need to be respecting Quebec as a nation within a unified Canada. Why does the new formula not respect that?

As my hon. colleagues have previously stated, this merits thorough debate and goodwill and yet the government shuts down debate after less than a day.

I, myself, in representing my constituents, only have 10 minutes because there is not time for many of us in the House to have the full

allocation of time. Many of my colleagues, who want to speak for their constituents to ensure their interests are represented, will not be allowed the opportunity to debate the bill. It is absolutely reprehensible.

We will fast-track the bill through the House and it will go to committee. What will happen at committee? I think the committee should go across Canada and visit every corner of the country to hear what Canadians think is the best way to have fair representation of all perspectives in the country.

I stood for that when I ran for office. I said that I would not just be another MP from Alberta who my constituents send to Ottawa. I said that I would work hard to bring the federal government back to the people. That is exactly the kind of process we should have in this area.

Frankly, I have not heard from any of my constituents that this is their number one priority, that there should be more seats either in our city or in our province. If it does happen, we should have our fair proportion of those new seats. My constituents are more concerned about extended care, positive education for their children and aboriginal children who do not have equal access to education or access to safe drinking water. Therefore, I would like us to take that dialogue out to Canadians.

We also need to take measures to ensure that every vote counts. In the last election, during the advance vote there was no poll on campus. I have three universities in my riding and they were all disenfranchised.

I work hard to represent temporary foreign workers. Who will speak for them?

• (1520)

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP has a position on this subject that is completely contrary to the principles of Confederation. I respect the member opposite and I know she is a hard-working MP, but this idea that a provincial division in the House should guarantee a certain number of seats, as proposed in the NDP's private member's bill, which, I think, is 24.3%, is not in accordance with the founding principles of Confederation.

In fact, during the time of the United Province of Canada, there actually was a guarantee for Canada East and Canada West. The legislature was divided into two. There were 42 seats for Canada East, Quebec, and 42 seats for Canada West, Ontario. That was in a unitary state and that was the deal. However, it was changed in Confederation to go to a federal system of government, with two orders of government, wherein the federal order of government, the lower chamber, the House of Commons, would be representative of the population.

That was the foundation on which Confederation was based. It was the argument put forward by the Liberal leader of the day, George Brown, many clear Grits in Canada West and many other people throughout the United Province of Canada. It was the reason for which these buildings were built. It is a fundamental principle of Confederation. We need to respect that principle. The House is representative of its population. It has been reaffirmed by the Supreme Court.

Government Orders

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I find that very amusing. Perhaps the member does not agree with the Prime Minister who believes that Quebec should be respected as a nation within a unified Canada. Surely, when we come forward with specific bills and policies, we should actually be putting substance before those fancy words.

I am proud to say that one of my ancestors was a Father of Confederation. The reason he decided to join forces is that he wanted responsible government. He did not want external people dictating how we should run our country, which is the same reason I ran. We need to respect that.

If we are simply going to go by representation by population, then why are we not including the representatives for the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland and Labrador? Why? It, hopefully, is because we all believe in representation by the different perspectives and regions in this country and we will also honour our commitment to Quebec.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member might recall that I asked a question of one of her colleagues with regard to the optimum number of members of Parliament that the NDP believes is necessary to have a fully functional House of Commons. The member made reference to Britain and said that we could have a lot more members of Parliament, implying that maybe an additional 30 is not enough.

I am wondering if she can enlighten the House as to how many members of Parliament the NDP truly believes is necessary in order to have a fair democratic foundation within the House of Commons.

• (1525)

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I will respond to the question from the same standpoint that I am responding to this very narrow bill presented by the government.

That is an issue that my party is trying to address in an open dialogue with Canadians. That is why New Democrats proposed replacing the Senate with proportional representation. We should not be making these decisions as one-offs. We could be better representing Canadians and providing fair representation from all perspectives, views and interests of people across this great country if, in fact, we had a broader dialogue about how better to do that. Do we still want to do it through an appointed body or do we want to do it through a House that generally represents the interests and perspectives of all Canadians?

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a fellow Albertan, it is important that I put on the record that Albertans are concerned about this issue. I represent the highest populated riding in the province of Alberta. I am sure the numbers in the census will indicate that the population of my constituency is in excess of 155,000. The hon. member, with all due respect, has the lowest population of any riding in the province of Alberta. That is maybe why she is not dialed in to the concerns that Albertans have with regard to this issue of being under-represented in the House.

Albertans are passionate about equality and representation. They want to see—

The Speaker: Order, please. I will have to stop the member there.

The hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, perhaps I am not dialed in because perhaps my constituents have confidence that I am available to them.

I am not opposed to this. As I have said, if there are to be increased seats based on population, of course Alberta should have additional seats. We have not had the dialogue yet on where those seats would be distributed, unless the hon. member knows something I do not know. I would like that representation as—

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member is out of time.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to pick up where one of my colleagues left off when he said that representation by population was a foundational principle of our Confederation deal. It is, indeed, a foundational principle. The issue of representation was, in many respects, the most divisive issue before the Fathers of Confederation. One of the Fathers of Confederation, George Brown, whose statue stands not 50 yards from where I stand today, insisted upon representation by population, equality of votes, equal weighting for all votes, one vote one value, as a fundamental foundational principle for this House.

The other House was set up to have equality regardless of the population changes between the regions. We have honoured that principle to the letter. I think we ought to honour, as best as we can, the other principle that was made by our ancestors 140 or 150 years ago to respect and ensure that each of us has equal weight as a participant in Canada's democratic process. To do anything else is to betray the foundational arrangements and values of this country. It is un-Canadian.

This is not unique to Canada. Every federation has, as part of its founding and constitutional arrangements, adopted a similar process. When we look at the Americans and the Australians, we see that exactly the same process was gone through. However, those countries have honoured their arrangements that every citizen has an equal vote in a way that Canada has not. We have repeatedly moved away from that principle.

The NDP purports in its motion, and this is absolutely astonishing, that it is divisive to try to move back to representation by population. Let anyone believe that is actually true or historically founded, I will read what Charles Tupper had to say in 1865 in the debates in the Nova Scotia House of Assembly on the subject of representation by population as opposed to the other formulae that were being tossed out at the time, which would have people in some provinces getting votes worth more than people in other provinces. He said the principle of representation by population:

...was the only true and safe principle on which the legislatures and the governments could be constructed in British America. That [an] eminent statesman predicted, twenty-five years ago—

That was in 1840.

—in reference to Canada—

That is to say, the province of Canada, Ontario and Quebec.

—that, if they undertook to ignore the principle of representation by population, the day would come when the country would be rent in twain.

Government Orders

Who does not know the difficulties that arose from the false principle that was applied at the time of the union of the Canadas, in order to give the ascendancy to Upper Canada—

Upper Canada, Ontario, was going to get more members than it deserved by its weight.

—whose population at the time was lower than that of Lower Canada? Who does not know that the prediction of Earl Durham has been verified? And the time has come when that country [Canada] has been convulsed, in order to rid themselves of a principle so unsound as that a certain number of people in a certain locality shall have an amount representation arranged not according to their numbers, but exhibiting a disparity with some other section?

That principle, which, unfortunately, we have allowed to creep into our Constitution, of abandoning representation by population, is what is truly divisive. We have gone through a long history in this regard. We have moved from the formula that was adopted, thanks to the sage advice of George Brown, Charles Tupper and others. We have moved away from that principle by a series of steps, further away from representation by population and more toward a system of increasing an institutionalized inequality. That is undemocratic, unfair, unreasonable and un-Canadian.

In 1915, we adopted one amendment to change our Constitution to allow for this principle to be deviated from. It seemed innocent enough at the time. No province could have fewer MPs than it had senators. In 1947, we moved to a system based upon a different formula that was designed to ensure that Ontario, my province, would not see its total number of members drop. In 1951, we adopted an amendment to that, and in 1976, a further amendment known as the “amalgam” formula was adopted.

Finally, in 1985, when we realized that the 1975 formula would result in the number of members in the House of Commons growing to an amount that was seen as too large, we moved, very unwisely, to a system that ensured an increasing level of under-representation for people in Ontario, B.C. and Alberta into the future and exacerbated with every census.

• (1530)

That was a mistake. We are trying to correct that mistake. We are doing so by means of adding some members to the House of Commons. How many? Fifteen for Ontario, six each for Alberta and British Columbia, and in order to ensure that Quebec does not suffer from under-representation, three for Quebec.

Members should understand that Quebec would get the percentage of seats in the House of Commons that its population warrants. If there is one thing and only one thing left that is good about our representation system today after the mess we have made of it for so many years, it is that at least Quebec is neither overrepresented nor under-represented. The formula proposed by the government would ensure that Quebec stays neither overrepresented nor under-represented and that it has the percentage of seats in the House that its population deserves.

We are not fully correcting the problem of Ontario, B.C. and Alberta being under-represented, but we are going a considerable distance toward it. It does not go as far as the amalgam formula proposed by Pierre Trudeau in the 1970s would have gone, but it is a great improvement over the status quo. I want the NDP members who have proposed and advocated their motion to reject what we are doing today to stop and think about this.

The people I represent in the riding of Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington are not especially rich or well connected and have no special advantages. I think it is the 74th or 75th wealthiest riding, which is to say it is the 25th or 26th poorest riding in Ontario. There is nothing to cause these people to be in a position where we can say that they deserve to be less represented, that they are already being taken care of. None of that is true. If that is true in my riding, then it is true in every other riding in Ontario, B.C. and Alberta that has no special advantages.

Why are we saying to them that their vote should be a fraction of the vote of another province? Why are we saying to them that their constitutionally guaranteed citizenship right to be able to participate in this system should have a lesser weight? Are they going to get a deduction on how much tax they pay? Would they be less of a participant when the government came along and told them what they must do? Absolutely not. To say that they are worth less, that they are a fraction of a voter, that they are a fraction of a citizen, that they are a fraction of a human being is undemocratic, illegitimate and an injustice that very much needs to be corrected.

This law would go partway toward correcting that. It is a very moderate, reasonable proposal. It is one which ensures that the smaller provinces, which are somewhat overrepresented, do not lose any seats. It is one which ensures that Quebec continues to get representation by population. It is one which ensures that the people whom I represent, and my colleagues from Alberta, B.C. and Ontario represent, get back some of their lost citizenship rights.

• (1535)

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his excellent speech. I know he really believes in democratic reform and representation by population.

A few options have been put forward by other parties in the House. I was wondering if he would take this opportunity to contrast the fair and democratic proposition we are putting forward with some of the propositions that are being brought forward by other parties that may have to worry about special interest groups and special favouritism for different parts of the country.

Could the member take this opportunity to explain to Canadians why it is important that we adopt this now so that we can move ahead promptly to get this in place?

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Speaker, there were two questions.

The first was about the other proposal that is out there, the proposal suggested by the New Democrats. I forget the bill number, but it is a private member's bill. It calls for some extra seats to be given to Alberta, B.C., Ontario and Quebec. However, the percentage for Quebec would be frozen at, I think it is 24.5% or something like that, which is the percentage of the population that Quebec had in 2006, and it would stay that way permanently. This is a version of another proposal made in 1992 and rejected by voters across the country as part of the Charlottetown accord package, where Quebec would have been frozen at 25% in perpetuity. At the time, that proposal was undemocratic, but it was being done, from a constitutional point of view, in the proper way.

If we want to move away from the principle of representation by population or proportionality, if we want to be less proportionate, we need to have an amendment that is approved by seven provinces and half the population. That is what the Constitution says. To do so by means of a section 44 amendment, unilaterally through the House of Commons, simply is unconstitutional.

By the way, I made that point in the committee that approves private members' bills. I pointed out that the bill is unconstitutional and should not go forward. I was voted down and it will go forward, but that does not change my view that it would be unconstitutional and would be rejected.

The second question relates to why we should move forward now. The answer is simply that it takes time to introduce a redistribution proposal. If we do not act promptly, we will be forced to use the old formula because the Chief Electoral Officer will be unable to follow through with the very slow and detailed process of redistribution which involves electoral commissions in each province, and so on.

[Translation]

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in between the time of the Charlottetown accord and the current situation, a key event took place in the House: the recognition of Quebecers as a nation within Canada. It is clear that, for the hon. member, this recognition does not mean that the nation should maintain its political weight in the House.

Is there anything concrete in this recognition, which was supported by his party, with respect to linguistic duality and Quebec's political weight?

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Speaker, the question refers to the motion passed by the House in 2006. That motion was not an amendment to our Constitution. To abandon the principle of proportionality, the Constitution must be amended, and that must be supported by the legislatures of seven provinces, as well as by 50% of the population. There is no motion that is more binding than our Constitutional legislation and no motion can unilaterally amend the Constitution. So, the Constitution stays the same and the principle of proportionality must be respected.

● (1540)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member talked from a principled position in terms of why the government had to bring forward this bill. I respect what it is he said, but that does not necessarily mean that I agree with a lot of his thoughts.

I welcome the member's involvement in this debate. I would suggest that he should be just as welcoming of other members of this chamber getting involved and participating in the debate.

Could the member explain to the House why the government has seen fit to allow just three or four hours of debate when there are 308 members of Parliament? We can see how restrictive that is going to be on 308 members, so imagine if this bill passed and there were 338 members.

Why would the government move a time allocation motion allowing for just two or three hours of debate? Does the member see

the ramifications of preventing members from being able to voice their concerns?

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Speaker, I do not have much time to answer this question because we are almost through my five minutes.

Very briefly, the answer is that we do face a deadline in terms of moving this bill forward so that the Chief Electoral Officer can summon the electoral boundaries commissions that cause a redistribution to occur.

If this bill were to go forward after the beginning of 2012, I think it would be very difficult as a practical matter to have any form of redistribution other than the one that is contemplated under the current law. There is really no time to switch horses in midstream after the end of 2011. That is the reason haste is required.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Just to clarify, the hon. member for Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington had a 20-minute time slot. Did the member mean to split that or not? There was a 20-minute slot and he spoke for about 11 minutes. Subsequently, there is a 10-minute question and answer period. I just wanted to make sure we did not miss the member splitting his time. Is that correct?

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Speaker, had I been aware, I could have gone on for another 10 minutes. However, I am happy to keep answering questions for the remainder of the 10 minutes. I will enjoy it even more.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the hon. member's speech, in which he made several historical references. My father is a retired history teacher, so I really appreciate people talking about the past, especially since the member appeared rather nostalgic. He talked about Lord Durham and the Act of Union, when Lower Canada and Upper Canada were joined, which reduced Quebec's political weight considerably within the united government. I will not remind the members of all of Lord Durham's great ideas to ensure that Quebec would lose its *raison d'être* and that the French language would be extinguished. I do not know if the member was feeling nostalgic when he referred to that.

What struck me most were the member's comments near the end of his speech when he answered a question from an NDP member about the motion recognizing the Quebec nation in the House of Commons. If I understand correctly—and if so, the cat will be out of the bag—he said that, in any case, it was not an amendment to our Constitution. What he was really saying is that recognizing the Quebec nation means nothing to him. I wonder if he could explain that.

[English]

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Speaker, let me begin by referring to Lord Durham's report. The member heard me quote Charles Tupper from the Confederation debates in the Nova Scotia House of Assembly. He did mention Lord Durham; Earl Durham he said.

Government Orders

I am not attempting to defend Lord Durham's position on anything. There are many things that are highly objectionable from a modern point of view in what he proposed. One thing that cannot be blamed on him, one additional wrinkle that was imposed by the British Parliament at the time, was the notion, designed by the way to oppress Quebec, of saying that Upper Canada, Ontario, which had fewer people would get equal representation. That was very unfair, very undemocratic. It also promptly backfired because the population of Upper Canada grew faster than that of Lower Canada, and by 1865, people like George Brown were complaining about the fact that his province was now underrepresented in proportion to Quebec. There is a certain delicious irony in that, I guess.

In the end, the very sensible result was that we decided to give representation by population to the lower house, to get rid of that injustice which had been intended to be an injustice against Quebec but wound up being an injustice against Ontario, to give equal representation in the upper house, and moreover to protect the rights of linguistic minorities by creating a federal system which is what we have done. That is the best explanation I can give as to what happened.

With regard to the motion in 2006, I will make the same point in English that I made in French earlier. We cannot amend the Constitution by passing a simple motion in the House of Commons. That is what the NDP effectively is suggesting has happened or could happen, but that is not the case.

In order to deviate from the principle of proportionality, in order to deviate from the idea that every redistribution must be at least as proportional, at least as close to representation by population as the previous one, if we want to deviate from that, we have to amend the Constitution by getting the support first of Parliament and then of seven provinces with more than half the population. The NDP's bill does not purport to do that, which makes it unconstitutional. It makes the 2006 resolution in the House of Commons about Quebec being a nation, une nation au sein du Canada, constitutionally irrelevant in a discussion about this piece of legislation.

• (1545)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that I have been afforded the opportunity, because of the generosity of my caucus colleagues, to make representation on this very important bill.

Last weekend, I had the opportunity of exchanging thoughts and ideas with constituents. On at least two or three occasions, I had constituents question why we were increasing the number of members of Parliament. The minister responsible made some announcements last week and a great deal of media attention was given to it. Canadians on the whole have a different feeling than what the government has proposed.

However, prior to getting into the debate, I want to highlight something that is really important, something on which we need to focus a bit of attention.

Yesterday, we had some wonderful people in the Speaker's gallery, such as world war vets, individuals who had participated in some of our modern day activities in Afghanistan and individuals who had been involved in our forces. At the same time, we recognized the importance of Remembrance Day and the efforts and sacrifices that

men and women today and yesterday had made, allowing us to even be inside this chamber and appreciate just how important our democracy is.

The very same day in which we were recognizing the important efforts of our men and women in the forces, today and in the past, the government chose to bring in time allocation as more of a normal type of procedure. It is almost as if it feels it is no longer an issue, that all it has to do is bring in a bill and within minutes or maybe an hour, bring in a motion to put time limits on debate. That causes a great deal of concern for many people, me included. I see the value of debate, of allowing members of the House to engage in discussions.

Some bills, more than others, warrant debate. With some bills there are differing opinions from all three political parties. I believe that quite often when we are listening to members debate a bill, it might actually influence someone who is listening. I believe individuals who watch the televised debates will enjoy much of the content that is expressed during the debate, as Canadians try to get a better understanding of the legislation before us.

The government will say that a bill is a priority. If it is a priority, there are other ways in which the government, in good faith, can work with the official opposition House leader and the Liberal Party House leader to try to accommodate the passage of a bill. There are other things we could do prior to implementing time allocation that would allow for additional debate.

When government members stand, and they have had a few speakers on the bill already, and talk about how important it is that we have fair representation, it is one of those principled stands with which I agree. I agree with fair representation. It is one of the cornerstones, one of the pillars of our democratic foundation. However, equally important is what takes place inside this chamber, how the government of the day manages the House affairs and how it proceeds.

I and the Liberal Party are very disappointed in the way in which the government has seen fit to bring in this legislation. I hope the government will reconsider other pieces of legislation as it introduces them.

• (1550)

It is bad policy to introduce a bill and then only moments later bring in time allocation, which, in essence, prevents healthy debate. It is unfortunate and I only hope the government will reflect on that.

It has had a majority, which is somewhat scary, for a few months and we have seen what it has done in the chamber in terms of rushing things through and what it has done in committees, always wanting to go in camera. There is a lot of concern and we are watching. We do not like what we are seeing. We hope it is not something that will continue in the future. Most Canadians will catch on and become very disenchanted with the lack of respect the majority government has demonstrated.

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There are some pieces of legislation on which the three parties in the chamber disagree. I suggest this is one of them. The Prime Minister has been quoted as saying, and I will paraphrase, that this bill would increase the number of seats now and in the future. In essence, what the Prime Minister and the minister responsible for this bill are saying is that the answer to the problem of fair representation is to increase the number of members of Parliament today and in the future. This is something with which we disagree.

I suspect the minister will be afforded the opportunity to ask me a question. Before doing so, he might want to reflect on what he believes the optimum number of seats should be for the House of Commons. If we listen to what the Prime Minister and the minister are saying, today we have 308 members, four years from now we will have 338 and I assume we could have close to 400 or something in excess of 400 some time in the next decade if we follow the recommendations of the government. It is fair to ask where that will stop.

In modern democracies there are fixed numbers. If we look, for example, at the United States, I believe there are 435 seats. The size of the population base does not matter. It has 435 representatives. We all know the population of the U.S. is 10 times the size of Canada. Why does the government not recognize, as other modern democracies have, that it does not have to constantly increase the number of members of Parliament and that there are other ways to adjust it.

I have heard a number of members say that Alberta, B.C. and Ontario need more seats. That is what they argue for fair representation. We can still achieve that balance if we operate within the 308 members. We can give Alberta, B.C. and Ontario fair representation, but the government has chosen to take a different route. As opposed to trying to limit the number of members of Parliament, it is going to support an indefinite amount of growth. We really do not know how much, but maybe the minister will enlighten us after I have had the chance to speak. This is a concern that not only I and members of the Liberal Party have, but it is a concern that Canadians have.

●(1555)

If we asked average Canadians if they wanted the number of politicians in the House of Commons increased and we thought they would say absolutely, we would be absolutely wrong.

Hon. Michael Chong: We want our fair share.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Fair share, yes; increasing the actual numbers, no. Therein lies a substantial difference between the Conservatives and the Liberals. As I pointed out, there is a difference in all three political parties.

I have been listening to the speeches given by New Democrats, trying to make an assessment. It reminds me a bit of the debates we had in Manitoba about remote issues versus urban issues. In Manitoba we tried to address that by having percentage variances on fairness in representation. I could be wrong, but I believe it is 5% in the south and then a voter variation in northern Manitoba. Some people want to see the variations increased to a certain degree, but they have been generally well-received.

I have had the opportunity to ask questions in regard to the NDP position on it. The response I have received are have indicated more concern with the numbering issue. For example, one NDP member said that we should look at England where members sit on benches. I have to wonder if the NDP is trying to give the impression that we should be getting rid of the desks and chairs and bringing in benches. Is that what we need in the House of Commons? That NDP member suggested that we just need to look at the other side of the ocean. I thought that was somewhat interesting.

I would like to continue to flush that debate out and the way to flush it out is to allow the debate to occur, but the Conservatives have limited that. I am interested in hearing more opinions from New Democrats.

As a member of Parliament, I love to share with my constituents not only what Conservatives are saying, but also what New Democrats are saying. I am interested in what they have to say. All I know for sure is that they do not have a problem with increasing the number of MPs by 30. They seem to be of the opinion that the percentage in rural ridings has to be increased so the ridings are not as big. They also seem to be of the opinion that it should be at least 25%. I might be corrected on that in terms of the province of Quebec. We will see how this whole discussion evolves.

I want to focus attention on the size factor. How many constituents is the optimum number of constituents that a member of Parliament can actually represent? I suggest a lot of that depends on resources. If members of Parliament are not given any resources, then they will not have the ability to hire people and service constituents, so they will want relatively small constituencies. If members of Parliament are provided with the opportunity to employ people, then they will be able to service a larger number of constituents.

In terms of the size of a constituency, we need to factor in the types of resources provided to members of Parliament to serve their constituents. I would be most interested in hearing about that.

●(1600)

I am quite satisfied, I must say, with the resources that I personally have been entrusted with and I do not take them for granted. However, as compared with being an MLA in the Manitoba Legislature, a member of Parliament gets considerably more resources, but the constituency is considerably larger. I think that somewhat proves the point.

In Manitoba, for example, there are 57 MLAs. An MLA has resources somewhere in the neighbourhood of about \$60,000, which allows him or her to have a constituency office and a staff person. Compare that to a federal constituency and we would see is that in Manitoba roughly four and a half provincial constituencies make up one federal constituency. If we do the math, it is not that far off, in terms of resources that are provided to a member of Parliament versus an MLA.

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I believe, given the resources that a member of Parliament is given here in Ottawa, that I am quite able to provide the same sorts of services that I would have been able to provide as an MLA, even though it is a much larger population base. That is why when I bring forward the argument asking whether we have to increase the numbers of members of Parliament, I challenge the government to provide a rationale as to why we need more members of Parliament.

The rationale that the Conservatives are using now is just strictly that they want to give more MPs to Ontario, Quebec, well, Quebec is more of an afterthought for the Conservative Party, Alberta and British Columbia. In essence that has been their rationale. They just want to give them more MPs and that by giving them more MPs, they would have more clout and there would be fairer representation, in terms of the equality of one vote.

Let us look at the numbers. We have 308 seats now. That is an actual increase of 30 seats. Ontario would get 15 seats, Alberta would get six seats, B.C. would get six seats, and the province of Quebec would be given three seats.

We have to put that into the perspective of the economy. Here we have a government, in its most recent budget, that is talking about the economy and how it is going to address, in part, the economy by making significant cutbacks every day that we are in session. I participate in many discussions among my colleagues. I hear about cutbacks in Atlantic Canada. Those cutbacks are serious. They would change lives in Atlantic Canada.

I suspect whether it is the Atlantic or the Pacific, from coast to coast, we are going to find that there are significant cutbacks taking place, that the government is wanting to downsize bureaucracy and our civil service, thereby reducing services. At the same time, with this bill, the government would increase the number of politicians. It just does not make sense.

My best guess is that if the Conservatives were to really caucus this and have a free vote, there would likely be more support to readjusting within the 308 seats, so that at least they could be consistent with their budget debates. That is just my best guess. However, the chances of that happening, I suspect, are not great.

• (1605)

I encourage the government to really reflect on what it is that it is doing on two fronts: the time allocation is wrong, the Conservatives are stifling debate; and increasing the number of seats indefinitely is the wrong thing to do. This is not what Canadians want.

Hon. Tim Uppal (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that the hon. member came here to make his speech, and I listened very carefully, but did not do his homework. He talked about growth in the future.

In 2021, under our fair plan, only 11 new seats would be added if the current predictions hold. In 2031, only five new seats would be added. We are being very open and honest about the numbers. The numbers are upfront.

The Liberals, under their own plan, are not being honest with Canadians about the numbers. Under the Liberal plan, Manitoba would lose three seats. Saskatchewan would lose five seats. Quebec

would lose six seats. Newfoundland and Nova Scotia would lose a seat.

I ask the hon. member, why is he not being honest about the numbers in his plan?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I have no idea where the minister pulls those numbers from, saying, “under the Liberal plan”. Maybe he could share that Liberal plan with the Liberal MPs. I have not seen the plan he is referring to and I am the one who is speaking on it. We are talking about the 308 seats. There is no need for us to increase it, but to the best of my knowledge, I have no idea what Liberal plan he is referring to.

Maybe it is backbench Conservative MPs who got together and said, “Pass this one over to the Liberals, and you are the messenger”. I do not mean to shoot the messenger. I will be more than happy to receive it from the minister.

He admits that this time it is a big one, it is a 30. Next time it will be 11 and then it will be five. That is conservative. Well, an increase is an increase is an increase. We are saying there is no need for an increase.

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am not necessarily opposed to fixing proportionality by population or geography. That is all right, but what I am really interested in, and we should all be really interested in, is proportional representation by party, whereas if the purple party gets 20% of the vote across Canada, the purple party should get 20% of the seats.

Is the real issue a need to add more politicians to the House of Commons? That is a lot like adding deck chairs to the *Titanic*.

My question to the hon. member is, I know the Liberals did not want it for a lot of years, but are they finally interested in getting some real good system of proportional representation for Canada, and will they get serious about it?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I believe that the Liberal Party of Canada is very keen on ideas and engaging Canadians on ways in which we can make a difference.

On a personal note, I am very sensitive to that issue. There are many examples that could be cited from all provinces where we have actually had majority governments elected in some provinces and they did not get most of the votes. That occurs a lot, whether it is here in Ottawa or the provinces. All political parties have been at different ends of it. The issue is which political party is prepared to be consistent, through good times and bad times.

I am not sure if the NDP is. We will find out in terms of how it continues to advocate that position here in Ottawa. In the province of Manitoba it did not advocate for it, but it depends.

• (1610)

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wish to comment on the comments made by my friend from Winnipeg North. What he is propagating is that, based upon a 308 seat House and having representation across this country, we have to have an average riding of 106,000 people.

Manitoba, with an average of just over 76,000 per riding, would have to lose two or three seats. This is what he is proposing.

Government Orders

I have the largest riding population-wise and the second largest geographically in Manitoba at 91,000. I am still 14,000 less than the numbers we are seeing in other areas of Canada. However, we would definitely have to reduce seats in Winnipeg.

The hon. member's riding has a population of only 79,000. I would suggest that if he were serious about reducing the number of seats in Manitoba, and he wants to go home and sell it, I would suggest that probably we could get rid of Winnipeg North.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I am not one to back down from a good healthy debate. I would suggest to the member that we contact Richard Cloutier of CJOB and debate it on his radio program. I will make myself available and hopefully, the member will make himself available. We will advance this script of *Hansard* over to Mr. Cloutier and perhaps he might give us an invite.

I know that a vast majority of Manitobans, members' constituents and my constituents, do not want 30 more members of Parliament. That much I know.

I am prepared to debate that. If at the end of the day that means that Manitoba has to lose a seat, the member and I can go to CJOB to see if it will allow us to have that debate publicly, if in fact he will accompany me. As I say, I will be sure to pass the—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. Questions and comments, the hon. member for Châteauguay—Saint-Constant.

[Translation]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my Liberal colleague if his party would maintain Quebec's representation at 75 seats with his plan to keep the total number of seats at 308?

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, my concern in terms of dealing with 308 seats is that we need to focus our attention on the ability of the province of Quebec to have the clout that it currently has. The percentage of clout that it has today under the bill is actually going down. I would not necessarily make the assumption that if we go to 308 seats that would be the case in that situation.

Quite frankly, the difference between the Liberals and the New Democrats is that members of the NDP are not sure exactly what they want and what they are prepared to say out west. In Quebec they will say that they want 25%, but we will not hear them say out west that Quebec has to have 25% of the representation inside the House of Commons. There needs to be more clarity on that point, but that is the essence of it.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the reason why the bill is so important is that we are currently electing new Canadians and visible minorities a voice in the House.

Only 10% of the House is reflective of the new Canada. Only 10% of the House is made up of visible minorities when their population numbers are double and within the next 20 years their numbers will move to one-third of the population. This bill would allow the most rapidly growing regions of the country a greater number of seats, so we can elect more Canadians who are reflective of the makeup of this country.

The change is coming. There is a galloping heterogeneity that is taking place in the country. This place is not reflected. The bill would go a long way to ensure that this place reflects the new face of Canada.

•(1615)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, in reality, the leaders and the riding associations, and the cliques that are out there throughout our many different communities have a lot more to do with that than the actual number of seats.

If we want to get new Canadians or people who are immigrating to our country involved, we must speed up the immigration and citizenship processes as opposed to the two year backlog we now have for them to get their citizenship. If we want them to be excited about participating, we must speed up the citizenship process to reduce the backlog.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Etobicoke North, The Environment; the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands, The Environment.

[English]

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in the debate on the fair representation bill. As my colleagues have noted, this is a fair, reasonable and principled bill, and I could not agree more.

During the election we committed to our constituents and to all Canadians that we would come back to the House and pass a formula that would restore fair representation to this House. The election was a time when we got to debate this with the people with whom we should really debate it. As we knocked on doors someone could bring up the representation in the House. In coffee shops we could talk about what the House should look like, and what was possible and what was not.

At the all candidates meetings we certainly had the opportunity to challenge each other, as my colleague from Manitoba just did with another colleague from Manitoba to talk about the issues of the day in the provinces they come from. I come from Ontario and in that province we surely did talk about the need for there to be more seats and a better representation for the province of Ontario. That debate has taken place outside the House, and today it is taking place here.

As the Prime Minister and the Minister of State for Democratic Reform have stated, we made three specific commitments to provide fair representation. We would provide a formula that would allocate an increased number of seats now and in the future to better reflect population growth in Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta. That sounds like a pretty good plan. We would protect the number of seats for smaller provinces to provide for their effective representation. That sounds like another good plan. We would ensure the proportional representation of Quebec according to its population. We are keeping these commitments with this bill.

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My colleagues have spoken passionately about these promises. Some members have explained the details of how the proposed formula would work. I am not going to repeat much of what my colleagues have already said. They have done an excellent job in talking about how it would affect the representation in very large ridings and the representation in the provinces that currently are under-represented. I thank them for doing that.

I would like to discuss some of the details and background of the changes to the readjustment process and the timelines that the bill proposes. I am the chair of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. That committee will oversee the examination of this bill during the committee stage. I would like to bring some of the experience and ideas of that committee to bear here in the House.

First of all, I would like to thank all of the members of that committee for their great work. We tend to work more as a consensus than we do anything else. It will be quite a load for us to take this on in the short period of time we will have to consider the bill. I ask ahead of time, and I know I will get it, for the co-operation of members of that committee to work together as we always do. The timelines will be tight. We will be able to do it if we work together.

Regarding the boundary redistribution process, our Constitution requires that we readjust riding boundaries every 10 years. Our rules for carrying out this task are set out in a piece of legislation called the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act. This law was put in place in 1964. Up to and including the boundary adjustments following the 1951 census, the House of Commons itself was responsible for fixing the boundaries of electoral districts.

A predecessor committee to the one which I chair was responsible for drawing the boundaries themselves. There was a considerable amount of political influence on the readjustment process prior to the 1960s. This was often referred to as gerrymandering, a term we use to describe the manipulation of riding boundaries along partisan lines, usually to the advantage of the incumbent or the dominant party.

An hon. member: Promise that won't happen again.

Mr. Joe Preston: Mr. Speaker, I hear someone who probably did that yelling from the other side.

Happily, we no longer have the problem of gerrymandering. It simply does not happen in our country any longer, largely because of the impartial, independent process set out in the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act.

In November 1964, the legislation was passed to assign the responsibility for readjusting the electoral district boundaries to commissions independent of Parliament and parliamentarians.

• (1620)

For political neutrality, each commission was, and still is today, chaired by a judge designated by the chief justice of the province. When passed, there were to be three members for each of the commissions. One of these was a person called the representation commissioner, a public servant who was to sit on every commission. The post of representation commissioner was abolished in 1979 and most of the duties were transferred to the Chief Electoral Officer of

Canada. That is where we stand today, a three member commission for each province.

Initially, the two other members were to be political appointees, one each from the governing party and the official opposition party. The Speaker of the House of Commons now makes those two appointments in the interest of greater impartiality and independence.

Now each province has a three member boundaries commission chaired by a judge and comprising two other members appointed by the Speaker. As each of the three northern territories constitutes an electoral district, they do not require an electoral boundaries commission.

The goal is a readjustment process that is generally free of partisan considerations. We have largely succeeded in accomplishing that goal.

That said, parliamentarians still do have input. They can make representations to the commissions during the public consultation period for those commissions. They can lodge objections during the parliamentary review process which is run through the procedure and House affairs committee, of which I am the chair. I look forward to the contributions and many visits by members to do just that during the process.

In all cases, the final decisions on the boundaries are made by the commissions. This is the guarantee of independence and impartiality. Partisan members can make presentations and lodge objections which the commissions will consider, but the commissions' decisions will be final. During the course of their work, the commissions receive professional, financial, technical and administrative assistance from the Chief Electoral Officer and his staff at Elections Canada.

Our procedure and House affairs committee visited the Chief Electoral Officer; all parties were in attendance. The committee tends to meet about once a session with the Chief Electoral Officer to talk about his goals and what is coming up. During the past three or four minority Parliaments, it was always about election readiness, but the Chief Electoral Officer, during this majority House, is quite happy to talk to us about being faced with the redistribution of seats and the redrawing of some electoral boundaries. He was quite forward with us as to how quickly this process has to start, that it cannot be delayed and that he has a great amount of work to do based on this project. He shared with members of the committee that he was looking forward to getting at it, as he put it.

As I mentioned, Bill C-20 makes some changes to the timelines of the commission process. The readjustment process would continue to be based on the census results which provide population counts at the geographic level that are necessary to accurately revise the electoral boundaries. The member who spoke before me talked about the size of ridings. His colleague mentioned how even within the province from which they both come, there is a difference in population of 20,000 between some of the ridings. It is imperative that we use the census to set the pace.

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The existing provisions in the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act call for the independent boundary commissions to be established in each province within 60 days of the receipt of the census return. The 2011 census is scheduled to be received on February 8, 2012, so it would be within 60 days of that date. The commissions then have one year to produce an initial report setting out the proposed boundaries and the names for the ridings, during which time they are required to hold at least one set of public consultations. Once the reports are finalized, the Chief Electoral Officer prepares a draft representation order which is forwarded to the responsible minister and proclaimed by the Governor in Council. The order becomes effective on the first dissolution of Parliament that occurs at least one year after the proclamation is issued.

Under the current timelines, it may take anywhere from 30 to 38 months to complete the readjustment process following the release of the census results.

• (1625)

There is some flexibility in the timelines as each commission works at a slightly different pace. There are some timeline extensions available if the commissions find them to be necessary. It would mean that the process would not be completed until about November 2014. The changes proposed in the bill aim to shorten these timelines in the current boundary readjustment process with a view to streamlining the process.

In particular, the bill proposes the following amendments: The independent boundary commissions would be established no later than six months following the census, or within 60 days of the census results being released, whichever comes first. The notice period for public hearings would be set at 30 days, down from the current 60 days. All persons interested in making submissions at public hearings would still need to provide the commissions with notice. The commissions would have the option of waiving this requirement if it was considered in the public interest. The timeline for the commissions to produce the reports would be shortened to 10 months, with a possible two-month extension, which is down from 12 months, with a possible six-month extension. The time period for the implementation of the representation order would be reduced to 7 months, which is down from 12.

With these changes, it would be possible to bring forward the completion of the boundary readjustment process to early 2014. That would give everyone, including the very busy and organized folks over at Elections Canada, the House and all registered parties more time to prepare knowing the new boundaries early in 2014. These changes and the other minor changes in the bill are to streamline and modernize the process to allow Elections Canada the flexibility and time it needs to do the work for the next election.

We politicians recognize that certain boundary changes will make work for us. We will have to look at how we are going to act within those new boundaries and whether we are picking up a new piece of a riding, losing a piece of an old riding, or whether there are no changes at all. Elections Canada has to then establish Elections Canada entities within each of the new ridings and under the new riding names too. It has work to do following the completion of the report. I do not think it can be done within moments of the next

election. Elections Canada needs some time to do it; that is what it has shared with us.

The changes we have suggested in shortening some of the timelines are reasonable. We have not compressed the timelines too much. We have left time for the commissions to do their work, to hold their public meetings, for people to make presentations. Oftentimes there is one commission per province. People sometimes suggest changes to a certain boundary because it splits a neighbourhood and that type of things, so there is time for the commission to do it.

All the changes are sourced in either the recommendations from the Chief Electoral Officer's reports, past reports from the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, or the report from the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing, known as the Lortie commission. The changes we are looking to make in the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act and in Bill C-20 have all been suggested by one of those sources.

There is ample public evidence and justification for the reasons and value of implementing these changes. We can be assured that Elections Canada will be fully prepared to implement and facilitate these changes in time for the next election.

As I have said, the Chief Electoral Officer has recommended many of these changes before. In the committee's visit to Elections Canada, he was very adamant that we meet the timeline so that he can meet his and is able to complete the process. For some of us, the spring of 2014 sounds far away, but as this process unfolds, it is a long time between each step and each step takes some period of time.

In order to make it work, it is important that we give Elections Canada enough time to set up the commissions, allow the commissions to do their job, have the report come back to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, at which point members of the House would also have an opportunity to discuss their own ridings. Then it would go back to the commissions for final approval and in time for people to prepare for the next general election.

• (1630)

The fair representation bill fulfills our government's long-standing commitment to move to fair representation. It would bring faster growing provinces, like Alberta, B.C. and the one in which I live, Ontario, closer to representation by population.

As we have heard discussed here today by many members of Parliament, one of the founding principles of our founding fathers was to get as close as we could. We have drifted a bit away and this would help bring us back to that proportional representation, while still protecting the seats of slower growing provinces and providing seats to Quebec in proportion to its population. The new formula corrects a long-standing imbalance in democratic representation between different provinces across the country.

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Last night, I had the opportunity to meet with a group of teachers from all the provinces and territories who were in town and, for the most part, they had a great interest. The ones who came to Ottawa obviously had some great interest in politics, or civics or history in the sense of our Parliament. As this was being debated yesterday, and some were here to hear some of this, it was a topic of conversation at dinner last night among many of those teachers. When we were talking about civics and history, the Ontario teachers were saying how they could relate it back and make some excitement for their students about the history around the founding of our country, the founding fathers of our country and the principles they tried to design Canada around. Now, here it is, some 140 some years later, and we are still talking about achieving representation by population.

If I remember back to my grade 6 history. I was kind of nodding off on representation by population. It has taken a great interest in history through my life to try to get back to it. Our founding fathers did something really great when they created this place. It is really good to hear teachers whose passion it is to try to share that and actually get through to guys like Joe when he was there before. I was really pleased to have that conversation last night. It was so timely with the debate that we are having here today.

In short, this is the best formula to move toward fair representation in a principled manner. It includes reasonable and long-standing updates to the timelines of the boundary readjustment process, which I spent a great deal of time talking about here, about how it happens after we pass the bill and how we really get to those new boundaries.

The bill is both good and very long overdue. I hope all the hon. members in the House also agree and will support the bill to try to bring us a little closer to where our founding fathers started us out.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I understand the member's position of supporting the government bill. It makes all the sense in the world: government member, government bill.

The member is also an Ontarian, like myself. In the government's previous bill, there were three more seats for our province than there are in this bill. I would like to know if he would like to join with us other Ontarians in fighting, during committee review, to get Ontario the seats that would bring it even closer to rep by pop under the old bill than this one, because there were three more seats for Ontario? Ontario lost three seats in the move from the government's last bill to this one.

Will the member join with us other Ontarians in fighting to get us those other three seats back?

• (1635)

Mr. Joe Preston: Mr. Speaker, the member for Hamilton Centre is a great addition to our committee whenever he is on there, and, of course, as we have heard, we need no microphone system when the member is there. He is really good at getting his point across in any way.

I see a lot of Ontario members of Parliament sitting on this side and they do a fantastic job of representing their people. Perhaps, as he states, they are representing even more people than they should

but they do such a great job. Ontario is a far better province under this bill with 15 new seats.

Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest when my colleague talked about gerrymandering and the influence that past practices have had on it. He introduced a new method of gerrymandering when he said that we were generally free of political interference. I would like my colleague to define what he means by generally free.

He mentioned that the Speaker would have to play a role in appointing people to a commission. The last time I checked, the Speaker is a member of the Conservative Party and the Conservative caucus. Is this the type of generally free that the member is talking about when they go to the boundaries commission?

Mr. Joe Preston: Mr. Speaker, I must point out the disrespect the member has just shown for the objectivity of the Speaker of the House of Commons. We just do not do that here. Our Speaker is elected by all members in the House, including that member, to act objectively. To impugn the motives of the Speaker is wrong. I expect you, Mr. Speaker, will somehow rule on a public flogging for that member because of that.

As I mentioned in my speech, the Electoral Boundaries Commission is set up in an absolutely non-partisan way to ensure this is at arm's-length from this place.

Even that member, with his disrespect for the Speaker, will get an opportunity to go before committee and talk about how his own riding's boundaries will look after it is done.

We did not pull out the old Liberal book of gerrymandering and look up how to do it. We fixed it.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to this debate back and forth and I want to comment on the hypocrisy of the opposition here this afternoon. I know I cannot say whether a member is in the House or not, but if a count were taken, we would find less than a dozen here and even fewer are participating in this hugely important debate on one of the fundamental principles that our country was based on, representation by population.

I come from Ontario and for years we have been under-represented. The truth of the hypocrisy here is that the opposition parties want to stall this legislation because they know that if they stall it right now there will be no change in the next election and we would have eight more years of under-representation. That is what those parties want for Ontario and the rest of this country.

I want to ask my colleague, who believes in the fundamental principles of Canada, what could be the motivation of the opposition parties to stall representation by population, particularly for my province of Ontario.

Mr. Joe Preston: Mr. Speaker, I would hate to put motive on hon. members of the House as to why they would do that. I will talk on the positive side.

This legislation that has been brought forward by the minister and will be voted on in the House would not only positively help my province and that member's province of Ontario, but it would also help Alberta, B.C. and all of Canada to get back to the reputation that our founding fathers brought forward, which is representation by population. We are going to get it.

• (1640)

[Translation]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was listening to my hon. colleague from Elgin—Middlesex—London, who spoke about the need for proportional representation. We know that the four ridings in Prince Edward Island are protected by the Constitution because a province cannot have fewer members than senators.

We also know that Quebec still has not signed the Constitution. The previous Conservative government attempted to remedy this situation by offering Quebec 25% of the seats in this chamber.

Does the member opposite realize that by continually lowering Quebec's representation in the House, he is providing Quebec secessionists with ammunition? Does he realize that?

[English]

Mr. Joe Preston: Mr. Speaker, I resemble that remark to when we talk about political weight in the House.

As the member can speak for his province, I can speak for mine. In the election leading up to what brought us here as a majority government, I spent much time in coffee shops, on the doorsteps and at all-candidates meetings and when we talked about the representation of members of Parliament in Ontario, I was commended and certainly sent back here. I was commended on the job we were able to do, even with the large size of some of our constituencies. Many people in Ontario said that we should be fair with all of Canada and give Ontario what it needs, too.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the hon. member for Elgin—Middlesex—London.

First, just for historical fun, it turns out that the term “gerrymandering” is as old as the War of 1812. It occurred in the state of Massachusetts when Governor Elbridge Gerry managed to redistribute a riding so it resembled nothing so much as a salamander.

As we add MPs, we are adding costs. I think the Canadian people are more concerned with the costs of this place than whether we have our own desks.

Would it be possible to have a formula by which current members of Parliament accepted reductions to their own salaries as we added new members to this place?

Mr. Joe Preston: Mr. Speaker, I will pass on the message that the member requires no salary to the Board of Internal Economy.

The rest of us came here to do a job and we were sent here as equals, as equal members of Parliament, all 308 of us. Some of the members from Ontario represent 170,000 and some of the members in the House represent less than that. If there is an inequality, we need to fix that part first.

Government Orders

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. NDP member for Hamilton Centre suggested that the present bill before the House of Commons is three seats short for Ontario, as compared to the previous fair representation bill that the government introduced in the last Parliament.

In fact, that is the result of census data that has now come in and been applied in the same fair fashion as we had foreseen all along.

The member across the way says that he will be fighting in the committee for three additional seats. Would the member explain how the NDP will amend census data in the committee on the fair representation bill?

Mr. Joe Preston: Mr. Speaker, I can only suggest that the member for Hamilton Centre will do it loudly.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

COMMENTS BY MEMBER FOR AVALON

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to draw to your attention that the comments made by the member for Avalon were disparaging comments about the impartiality of the Chair.

I will quote from O'Brien and Bosc, chapter 13, page 615. It reads:

Reflections must not be cast in debate on the conduct of the Speaker or other Presiding Officers. It is unacceptable to question the integrity and impartiality of a Presiding Officer and if such comments are made, the Speaker will interrupt the Member and may request the remarks be withdrawn. Only by means of a substantive motion for which 48 hours' written notice has been given, may the actions of the Chair be challenged, criticized and debated. Reflections on the character or actions of the Speaker or other Presiding Officers have been ruled to be breaches of privilege.

Mr. Speaker, I demand that the member for Avalon withdraw those remarks or you summon the Sergeant-at-Arms to have him removed.

• (1645)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The Chair appreciates the intervention by the member for Selkirk—Interlake. If the member would like to involve himself at this point that would be acceptable but, if not, the Speaker will review the transcript of today's occurrence and will return to the House if necessary.

Resuming debate. The hon. member Hamilton Centre.

* * *

FAIR REPRESENTATION ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-20, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867, the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act and the Canada Elections Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to join in the debate.

Government Orders

First, we will not be supporting the bill at second reading, primarily, for the very simple reason we believe the government bill is not as good as our bill. We like our bill. We think it would be better for Canada and that is the message we carry into committee. If we support our own bill, why would we vote for the government bill at this stage?

Comments were made along the way by myself and our leader that we were very much looking forward to what happened at committee. I want to underscore that point and that intent on our part. I heard the member earlier commenting about whether the member for Hamilton Centre was going to change the census and some other smart-alecky type of remarks. Perhaps that is the answer. It is as simple as there are new numbers.

However, I know we have at least three different calculations going on at the same time and we are going to need some clarity around it. That is fine for the government. It has all the resources of government. All we really have as members on this side is committee. That is the closest we can get to match the horsepower of the government in terms of the lawyers, analysts and everything else that is available to whomever is in government at any time.

One of the most important messages that I will carry on behalf of our caucus is the importance of committee studying this bill. It is important on any bill, but on this one, given that this is the file marked "Canada", that we take the time to get it right. We do not want to take time such that we do not have things in place for the next election. We agree with the goal. I have told that personally to the minister. I have said that publicly. I reiterate it again. Regardless of whatever machinations we go through in this place on second reading and in the House and on voting, we have all kinds of games that go on all the time, often for reasons that are not even readily obvious.

However, the fact remains that we want to get to committee. We want to do the work. Ideally, in the best world outcome, would it not be great if all the parties, or at least a majority of the parties, could agree rather than a situation where, like we saw with the Auditor General hiring, only the government carries the day and uses the weight of its might. Let us remember that might still comes from a very undemocratic place, perfectly legitimate and democratic to the extent it follows our rules, but there is no sense of natural justice or democracy when 39% of the vote gets 100% of the power.

I take at face value the comments of my colleague from Elgin—Middlesex—London. He is a fantastic chair. He commented on the work we do, and I have been spending a fair bit of time on that committee, dealing with the Chief Electoral Officer's report, with all the changes to the laws. We hope the minister in some way, by standing in his place and commenting, or by sending a message, or talking to me or talking to our House leader, could indicate that we really will go into committee with the same type of attitude that currently prevails when deal with the electoral commissioner's report. At that committee, we really have give and take. When we cannot agree on something, we put it later on in the agenda. We all do a little homework and we actively try to find how we can all put a little wine in our water to reach a point where we can agree on fair rules for elections.

If we can do it for that, then I would go so far as to implore the government to be serious in that same way, as opposed to what happens at some committees where the 100% might of the 39% vote walks into committees, says this is the way it will be and, no matter what anyone says, rams it through with their majority. If that is what the Conservatives do with this bill, then I would be disappointed and they would do a great disservice to the file marked "Canada". We could all do better than that in continuing to build and strength Canada.

• (1650)

I assume the vote is still on track to happen this evening and we will be voting against the bill for the simple reason that we like our bill better. Why would we vote for the government bill?

However, once we get into committee, as far as we are concerned, we are ready to hit a reset button. We would then have two pieces of legislation and a committee of people with goodwill. Maybe we could then begin to see if there were some way to close the gap between the differences.

For instance, members will remember that when the government brought in its first two bills, it did not have any seats for Quebec. However, we now see in this bill less seats for Ontario and B.C. If that is because of a calculation, fine, we will listen.

Again, there are at least three different calculations going on. There is one calculation based on using the 2006 census numbers, which the government had been using previously. There is the 2011 census that will be received in February 2012. However, in Bill C-20, the government does not use census numbers in the equation. I am not saying that it is a bad thing or a good thing, I am just saying that it is a new thing that we need to have some explanation and discussion on in committee.

Instead of using a census number, the government is now using the estimated provincial population estimates. However, I am no lawyer and I do not necessarily know what that means. Maybe it is a good improvement and the government may be applauded for bringing in a better formula, but maybe not. I do not know.

I just know that when the Conservatives finally came up with the notion that they had to be more respectful to Quebec then they had been, suddenly they changed the formula. Does that mean they changed the formula to meet the mathematical outcome they wanted? I do not know, but we need answers to that.

If the government is just going to come in to committee and ram things through, then the opposition is going to be given no opportunity to not only understand it, but maybe respond with a counter proposal as well. Again, these are things that would allow us to find a way to work together to get as close as we can to a single bill that we all might be able to support. Would that not be a win for everyone, especially for Canada?

I will not dwell on this, but I want to take a second to talk about the Liberal position. I know questions are going to come during the questions and answers, and they are going to do what they do. They seem to have one note to play on this and they play it over and over. That is their right. I am not suggesting that they cannot do this, but I am suggesting that it is disappointing.

Government Orders

The Liberal Party can really take an awful lot of credit for much of what we have to be proud of because the Liberals were the government in many of those years. It is a historical fact that a lot of the things we are now building on were put in place by a Liberal government, not all of them, but a good bit of it.

Certainly the current leader of the third party is a respected individual who has history on the national file, not only as a national leader but as a provincial leader. The member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville is a well-regarded academic expert on matters of constitution, regardless of how one feels about the Clarity Act. I know it is not loved unanimously, nonetheless it was an important piece of our Canadian history in building and strengthening our great country.

I use those two members as an example because I am saying positive things about the Liberals. They are important contributors to a national debate, whether one agrees with them or not. However, I am disappointed because all I have heard so far is the cost. However, that is real, especially at a time such as this economic era.

• (1655)

I think back to the Liberal governments of the past. Would they have led with that issue and said that the most important thing in terms of building Canada was to keep the costs down, like that was the priority? It is always important, but is it really the priority this time?

The Liberals suggest that we cap and then look at proportional representation. I am just happy when Liberals say the words "proportional representation". It is a good start. It is an intriguing idea, but it feels more like an escape hatch than a new idea because it allows the Liberals to stand on one piece of ground, and that is the cost and how big this place will be. Again, it is an issue but that is it.

When the leader of the third party was the premier of Ontario, he played a significant historical role in the Charlottetown accord, notwithstanding the outcome was not as good as I am sure he and others hoped. It was in the Charlottetown accord where the first notion of a percentage floor of Quebec's seats, in terms of its political weight, would be maintained going forward, no matter what. That number was 25%. Now it is interesting that not only was the leader of the third party a signatory to that agreement, but the prime minister of the day was a Conservative.

If this notion of providing that kind of a guarantee is so un-Canadian, is just pandering to the province of Quebec and is loosening the ties that create our country, if that is what is wrong with our coming out with 24.35% and tying it to the day that we all stood unanimously in this place and proudly recognized the Québécois as a recognized nation within a united Canada, we believe it is building and strengthening Canada. It is certainly showing Quebec the same respect that the prime minister of the day and those premiers unanimously agreed would be a component of the Charlottetown Accord.

I raise that because I would like to hear what the leader of the third party thinks about the notion of 24.35%. Given that he was a signatory to 25%, I would like him to do exactly the same thing. I would very much like to hear more from the third party on what it thinks about the bill, the seats and the formula. Maybe we will hear

from it and I will stand corrected, which would be great. However, we have not heard a lot. All I have really heard is the Liberals found this ground of the cost because people were concerned about it. It is part of being a parliamentarian. We defend what we believe in. We know that democracy can be slow, tedious, messy and expensive, but it is still better than any other system around. Therefore, we are wedded to it and we want to make it work. We see the expense as an investment in Canada, an investment in strengthening Canada. I ask my colleagues to remember that if Canada were easy to build, everyone would have one. It is not. It is a difficult country to build.

Let me underscore the importance of the committee, and I will end on that. It is close to where I began. So much work needs to be done there. The member for Elgin—Middlesex—London cannot do much more than what he did, which is to say he is looking forward to chairing that kind of a meeting. However, the member does not have the power to say that is the way it will be. That will have to come from on high. I know it is a shock to my colleague's ego but I am sure he will survive it.

Truly, honestly and sincerely we need some indication from the government that it will approach it the same way we are looking at reviewing the election laws. I applaud the government, the chair and everyone on that committee because it is good work and I enjoy it. It is challenging but in a positive way, where we are all trying to find how we can work together rather than how we can be the strongest, apart, fighting one another. After 26 years in politics, I find that a lot more fulfilling than going into our respective corners and starting to politically shoot.

• (1700)

Regardless of the machinations of today—the speeches, the give and take and the cut and thrust of what happens in this place—given the importance, we are hopeful that when we get to committee, it will be meaningful, real give-and-take discussions and work.

If it is the other approach, in which the Conservatives just say, "This is our bill. We are not changing anything. We do not care if you do not like it. Take the time that you get to speak, and when you are done bothering us with your words, then we are going to utilize the 100% of power that we got with 39% of the vote. We are going to shut you down and we are going to dictate what is going to happen", that attitude has nothing to do with building Canada. What is needed is co-operation and respect for each other, for all our provinces and for everyone's rightful place in our country.

Let us get to work. When we are finished the politics of the voting and debating today, I urge the Conservatives to signal that they want to entertain meaningful discussions to get as close as possible to, ideally, one bill that we could all support, so that even if we are in disagreement at some point, the overall exercise would leave Canada stronger than when we started on the bill.

Government Orders

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will end my remarks. Thank you again for the opportunity.

Hon. Tim Uppal (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member talked about getting the bill to committee and working in committee. We agree that is a good idea, but I would like to remind the hon. member that after just one hour of debate, it was the NDP that proposed a motion for the bill not to pass second reading and not to go to committee. It was actually the NDP that tried to stall the bill.

The hon. member mentioned the bill from the NDP. He did not talk about the numbers. The NDP's proposal would bring about 10 more seats to Quebec. Why is he opposed to the proposal we brought forward? It is a fair proposal, fair for all provinces, that would bring every province closer to representation by population and would have Quebec at equal representation to the population: with 23% of the population, Quebec would have 23% of the seats in the House of Commons.

Why is the hon. member opposed to fairness for all provinces?

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, first I want to thank the minister for staying for my remarks and for rising and responding. I appreciate his respect and his courtesy.

My answer would be very directly to him and the government: why are they not prepared to give effect to the unanimous motion that we passed and show the kind of respect that gives meaning to that by recognizing, first of all, it is not just about Quebec? It is also about other provinces; they are not up to their full representation by population either, so there is work undone whether the bill passes or not. There is still some work to be done.

Why are the member and his government not prepared to show Quebec the respect that it deserves, recognizing that all it is trying to do is survive assimilation in Canada? They want to be strong within Canada, because if they are strong within Canada, they are strong within North America.

We have already recognized that we do not want that culture to be lost, so why are the Conservatives not prepared to step up to the plate and show leadership on nation building and the kind of respect that we showed when we voted unanimously for that motion?

Mr. Parm Gill (Brampton—Springdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Hamilton Centre for his very passionate speech, but I also must say that he hurt my feelings during his speech when he said that he would not be supporting the government bill.

Earlier in the day I spent half an hour here making my speech and answering questions. I thought I had all the opposition members convinced, but obviously that was not the case. We still have some time. I am hoping that the opposition members see the light at the end of the tunnel.

In my riding of Brampton—Springdale and other ridings in the GTA, there is a huge representation gap. I heard that during the campaign. I still hear that today, and I think the bill the government is proposing does everything that it needs to do. It obviously moves provinces a lot closer to representation by population.

I would like to plead once again to the opposition members to please reconsider and to support the government in the bill. Let us move forward with it.

• (1705)

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question and for its tone. It is very much appreciated.

Let us recognize that if this legislation were perfect, we would not need this debate, but huge problems remain. We have problems related to our Constitution. We cannot disassociate them, especially when the government is about to pass a bill requiring that senators be elected. B.C. is woefully unrepresented in the Senate. Where is the remedy?

To suggest that the bill is the be-all and end-all is just not the case. It is a good start and it moves closer to where our bill was, so obviously we feel better about it than previous government bills, but it does not do enough. It could do more, and that is why the emphasis is on committee.

I accept the member's conundrum over why I am saying that about the committee and saying that the second reading vote is going to happen the way it is. I do not mean to be condescending, but after being around here for a while, we realize that some things that happen here matter, while some things that happen here really matter; what really matters in this case is what happens when we get to committee, not the politics in this place today.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I just want to point out to the member opposite that the recognition of Quebec's nationhood was not unanimous in the House.

There is no constitutional principle that guarantees any provincial division in the House a certain number of seats. That was never the basis on which our Constitution of 1867 was struck. In fact, the very basis of Confederation was to solve that very problem in the old united Province of Canada, in which Canada West and Canada East administratively were each guaranteed 42 seats. Because that arrangement led to under-representation of Canada West in the House, George Brown, the leader of the Liberal Party at the time, demanded representation by population.

The solution was found. It was a federal system of government with two sovereign orders of government, one federal and one provincial. At the federal level, the House of Commons would be representative of its population. No particular provincial division would be guaranteed any particular percentage of seats in the House, as it was in the old case of the united Province of Canada for which this legislature was built.

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, I grant that the hon. member is very knowledgeable in this area, but let us remember that the founding fathers did not talk about an elected Senate, which the Conservative government seems quite comfortable in doing now.

Let us remember that this whole notion of a permanent base of weighted seats in the House was contained in the Charlottetown Accord. I remind that member that it was his party's prime minister who led that document. There was unanimous agreement.

Government Orders

I stand corrected on the other one, and I will not use that term again. I will use the correct term.

The fact remains that there was unanimity by the Progressive Conservative prime minister of the day and every premier of the provinces and territories. True, it did not hold, but I am pointing out that there was a moment in time when that idea was accepted as an important part of continuing the job of building Canada and strengthening Canada.

• (1710)

[Translation]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I greatly appreciated the beginning of the hon. member's speech, when he talked about a bill that seems to be a good start but also about the suggestions made by the other parties.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. If I am not mistaken, there is a problem with the interpretation. It is working now? Okay.

The hon. member for Pierrefonds—Dollard.

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe: Mr. Speaker, let me start again. I greatly appreciated the beginning of the hon. member's speech, when he talked about a bill that seems to be a good start but also about the suggestions made by the other parties—all the alternatives and all the improvements that could be made to this bill—that deserve to be examined in a non-partisan way by a committee.

Unfortunately, the questions that the hon. member has been asked to this point have not necessarily demonstrated an interest in debate but, rather, have served to criticize the position of the opposition.

Could the hon. member repeat the importance of holding real, non-partisan debates in committee and share with us some of the suggestions made by the other parties that could inform the debate?

[English]

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, it says a lot that it is one of the newest, youngest members from Quebec who is underscoring my message as a former Ontario cabinet minister that we want to work on this together. We have a policy of 24.35%; we believe in that and we are going to fight for it and defend it, but the fact remains that we go in willing to talk and willing to put all matters on the table.

I am so glad the member underscored the point that it is not just me and it is not just a political message; it really is what this entire caucus wants to do. No one in the House, and certainly no one in my caucus in the official opposition, believes that anything less than the file marked "Canada" is the top priority for all of us.

I do not have time to get into the kinds of details we might propose, but we would be quite willing to entertain ideas from all members from all parties. In this discussion the key word, as my colleague said, is "non-partisan". Let us do the job for Canadians, not for our parties, when we—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Questions and comments.

The hon. member for Kitchener—Conestoga.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is good to work with my hon. colleague on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. We do have great discussions there on the Chief Electoral Officer's report. All of us want to work in a collaborative way in the House, and our committee has certainly demonstrated that under the great leadership of our chair.

I think my colleague would agree that we have been working on this election report for probably a year and a half. It has been a long time. We have had good discussions, but unless there is something done about representation, we will go back to the status quo. We are under a tight timeline. Our Chief Electoral Officer has indicated that quite clearly, in writing and in person.

I am wondering if the member is actually prepared to let discussions, as he calls them, bog down and end up with the status quo, as opposed to moving ahead with what is a very fair bill. Canadians can support this bill.

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, sometimes we develop friendships in this place. Clearly this is one of them, and I thank my hon. colleague for his remarks.

I would point out a couple of things. One is that although it has been a year or so, let us remember that we adjourned that study many times and moved on to other things because other priorities came to the committee, so it was not a full year.

I think the member is hoping to get from me a clear indication that we are not looking to be obstructionist about the bill. He wants to hear from me that if we end up with the status quo, the government would have failed; however, collectively, we all would have. I would still blame the government, because it has all the power, but collectively we all would have failed.

On behalf of our caucus and our leader, I reiterate that our goal is to go in and do that kind of work. Yes, we are prepared to put in whatever hours it takes. If we want to travel and talk to Canadians in every corner, we are prepared to do that, but we very directly recognize that there is a limit to how long we can go. We are open-minded as to what that is, but we want to maximize the time necessary to do the work to ultimately arrive at the best bill possible with the broadest support in the House.

• (1715)

Ms. Wai Young (Vancouver South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for having given us great encouraging words today. Working together, he understands that we are moving toward fair representation. It sounds very hopeful that members opposite will support this bill.

Government Orders

I am very pleased to speak to Bill C-20, fair representation act. I am honoured to be the member of Parliament for Vancouver South, one of the most diverse ridings in all of Canada. Approximately 75% of those whom I have the privilege of representing in this place are of Chinese, South Asian, Filipino and Vietnamese descent. Not only are we diverse, we are large with a population of 125,000 in Vancouver South, many of whom are new Canadians and have been under-represented, as all British Columbians have been for some time.

Our government received a strong mandate from Canadians to move toward fair representation in the House of Commons. The people of Vancouver South and British Columbia, in fact Canadians from across this country, are excited because we are acting.

Bill C-20, fair representation act is extremely important, completely necessary and very timely. This is because the people of Vancouver South, their families, friends and neighbours across British Columbia want fairer representation in this place.

We, therefore, welcome this important bill which delivers on our government's long-standing commitment to move the House of Commons toward fair representation. In particular, the bill reflects the government's three distinct promises to provide fair representation by: allocating an increased number of seats now and in the future to better reflect population growth in Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta; protecting the number of seats for smaller provinces; and protecting the proportional representation of Quebec according to population.

This bill provides the changes necessary to move British Columbians toward fair representation in this House. This bill is necessary because the representation of the provinces in this House is readjusted every 10 years. The formula has evolved considerably since Confederation, in which representation by population was the sole basis upon which seats were distributed.

It has been adjusted on six occasions since Confederation to respond to demographic changes as our vast and diverse country grew and evolved. The changes to the formula have attempted to balance three competing objectives.

First, to enable provinces with growing populations to have additional seats in accordance with the principle of representation by population. Second, to ensure the effective representation of smaller and slower growing provinces. Finally, to limit increases in the membership of the House of Commons to practical levels.

It was the latter objective which provided the impetus for the last change to the formula in 1985. In response to the realization that the formula, which existed at the time, would result in very large increases to the size of the House of Commons, a decision was made to design a formula that would provide more modest increases to the size of the House.

The 1985 formula allocates provincial seats by first determining what is called the electoral quotient, which is the population of the provinces divided by 279, which was the number of provincial seats allocated in the House of Commons in 1985. Each province's population is then divided by the electoral quotient to determine provincial seat allocation.

The second step in the formula is to apply two minimum seat guarantees, the Senate floor, which was added in 1915, guarantees that no province can have fewer seats in the House of Commons than it has senators, and the grandfather clause, added in 1985, which guarantees that no province can be allocated a number of seats that is less than the number of seats it had in 1985.

By fixing the divisor at 279, the 1985 formula did have the desired effect of limiting the growth of provincial seats in the House of Commons. However, it also had a negative impact that worsened over time and that has led us to where we are now, where the faster growing provinces of Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia are significantly under-represented.

Taken together, the effects of the 1985 formula and the two seat floors are significant. First, it means that all provinces, except Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta, rely on seat floors rather than population to maintain their seat count in the House.

● (1720)

Second, the formula allows the three faster growing provinces to get a proportional share of only 279 seats even though the House has expanded to 305 provincial seats since the 1980s with three additional seats for the territories, totalling 308, our current number.

Third, the four seats for slower growing provinces, which are not based on population, further erode the relative representation of the faster growing provinces. As a result, the three faster growing provinces have become significantly under-represented in the House.

For example, British Columbia has only 11.8% of the provincial seats while its share of the provincial population is over 13%. The situation in Ontario is even worse. Ontario has only 34.8% of the provincial seats while its share of the provincial population is over 38%.

The combined effect of fixing the divisor at 279 in combination with the existence of the seat guarantees has prevented the faster growing provinces from receiving a share of seats that is in line with their relative share of the population. The result has been to significantly increase the disparity between the provinces protected by seat guarantees and the faster growing provinces that do not benefit from the guarantees.

Bill C-20 has been designed to bring those provinces closer to representation by population while at the same time protecting the seat counts of the slower growing provinces and ensuring that Quebec maintains a level of seats that is proportionate to its population. This bill was designed to deliver a fair and reasonable balance between the principles, while lessening or eliminating, to the greatest extent possible, the negative effects of the current formula.

The bill's key elements include many things, but before getting into a detailed explanation of the elements of the bill I would point out an important change related to the population figures that will be used to determine the allocation of seats by province.

Whereas the decennial census figures were previously used to determine the allocation of provincial seats, the bill proposes to require the use of population estimates as of July 1 of the year of the decennial census to determine the allocation of seats. The population estimates are considered the best data available because they are adjusted to account for the census net undercoverage, which is the extent to which persons who should have been enumerated but were not included in the census data.

The net undercoverage for the 2006 census was 2.8% and varied from province to province. The lowest net undercoverage was in Quebec and in Newfoundland and Labrador at 1% each, while the highest provincial rates were 3.8% in Ontario, 3.5% in Alberta and 2.9% in British Columbia.

We can see from these higher undercoverage rates that even the census had a hand in furthering the under-representation of these three faster growing provinces. The population estimates are already used to determine the allocation of funding for the federal-provincial equalization program, the Canada health transfer, the Canada social transfer and the territorial formula financing.

Using the population estimates also provides certainty on the provincial seat numbers whereas census figures will not be available until February of 2012.

The updated seat allocation formula contained in the fair representation act will move Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta toward fair representation while protecting the number of seats for slower growing provinces and ensuring that Quebec receives a number of seats proportionate to its population.

The formula introduces a new concept that did not apply in the 1985 formula, which we can call the representation rule. If a currently over-represented province becomes under-represented as a result of the application of the updated formula, additional seats will be allocated to that province so that its proportional representation according to its population is protected. This is a wordy concept, but it is fair and respects the principle of proportionate representation.

Based on population projections, Quebec would be the first province to receive new seats in accordance with this provision, but it applies to all provinces who may find themselves in this situation.

For the 2021 year and each subsequent readjustment, the bill provides that the electoral quotient will be increased by the simple average of provincial population growth rates from the preceding adjustment.

• (1725)

The practical result of applying the new formula will be to add an additional 30 seats to the House of Commons, for a total of 338. This is 23 more seats than would have been added pursuant to the 1985 formula. By introducing a readjustment formula that is more responsive to population size and trends, the fair representation act would move the House closer to fairer representation and maintain its growth over time in a more principled and accurate way.

Government Orders

This is especially important for fast growing areas of the faster growing provinces. We have heard how this would affect the Toronto area, but this is also important for the Vancouver area. My riding and the surrounding area is a large, dense and fast growing area. It is a magnet area for new Canadians and, as such, is especially affected by the shortcomings of the current formula. British Columbia, my home, would rightfully be a beneficiary of the principled changes to representation in the House that would take better account of our high rates of population growth now and into the future.

In addition to the updated formula for allocating seats, Bill C-20 also proposes amendments to the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act, which sets out the process for readjusting electoral boundaries within provinces once the allocation of the seats by province is known. The readjustment process would continue to be based on census results, which provide population counts at the geographic level that are necessary to accurately revise electoral boundaries. The existing provisions of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act, that call for independent boundary commissions, decide on riding boundaries and names would remain unchanged.

This process was established in 1964, changed slightly in 1979, and remains independent and impartial. I know the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands raised a question about this process recently. I can assure her that an impartial independent process would continue unchanged.

We are amending the timelines involved to streamline the process and ensure that Canadians would be more fairly represented as soon as possible. The bill does not propose any changes to the parliamentary review process, where members have the opportunity to bring forward their concerns about the boundary readjustments proposed in the initial reports from the commissions.

The fair representation act would fulfill our government's long-standing commitment to move toward fair representation. It would bring the faster growing provinces of Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia closer to representation by population while protecting the seats of slower growing provinces and providing seats to Quebec in proportion to its population.

The new formula corrects a long-standing imbalance in democratic representation among the different provinces of our federation. In short, it is the best formula to move toward fair representation in a principled manner. I hope all hon. members of the House will also agree and support this bill in order to restore fair representation in the House.

Government Orders

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am very impressed and wish to thank the hon. member for addressing so directly a concern that I raised in question period. I very much hope that the commission would function in a non-partisan manner and only wish to confirm that I would never have raised a concern at all had the idea of redistribution for electoral advantage not emerged in the Conservative Party's Saanich—Gulf Islands newsletter. I am very relieved and I thank the member for her assurances.

Ms. Wai Young: Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge the comments of the member opposite and assure her, as I said in my speech, that, indeed, the commission would be independent and impartial.

• (1730)

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the reality today is that this House of Commons does not reflect the makeup of Canada. The reality is that only 10% of this House of 308 members come from visible minority communities, when in fact today one in five Canadians is a visible minority. The fact is that if we look at the 30 most densely populated ridings in this country, 15 of them have visible minority populations greater than 25%, and most of those ridings are in the regions of Toronto, Vancouver, Calgary and Edmonton. That is why we must pass this bill. Otherwise, the problem will only get worse.

Statistics Canada is reporting on the galloping heterogeneity of Canada. By 2031, in a short 20 years, one in three Canadians will be a visible minority and almost half the population will be either foreign born or born to a foreign parent. That is why this bill is so important. We need to ensure that we add seats to regions like Toronto and Vancouver, in ridings in areas like that of the member for Vancouver South, to ensure that this democratic House which should be representative of the population reflects the makeup of Canada today and the makeup of Canada tomorrow.

I am wondering if the member for Vancouver South could tell us how this bill will ensure that new Canadians and Canadians across the country would be better reflected in the makeup of this chamber.

Ms. Wai Young: Mr. Speaker, indeed it is true that across Canada our diversity is growing. We are becoming more and more diverse, but that diversity is being represented less and less. With the addition of 30 seats to this House, we would have better and fairer representation. That would add 15 seats in Ontario, 6 seats in Alberta and 6 seats in British Columbia. Certainly my constituents in Vancouver South look forward to fairer representation.

[Translation]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I heard my colleague conclude her speech by saying that she hopes all hon. members will support the bill.

I am wondering if she hopes that all members, from all parties, will always be 100% supportive of whatever the Conservative Party proposes, without asking any questions, or if she would like all the parties to be able to work together to propose bills that really represent all regions of Canada.

If the second hypothesis is true, I wonder if the member also hopes that the committee will be open to examining proposals from all parties in order to improve the bill.

[English]

Ms. Wai Young: Mr. Speaker, I would like to reiterate a comment that was made earlier, in that we did receive some fairly stringent timelines from Elections Canada to move forward on this bill. Therefore, given that situation and given we have already heard where our population across Canada is, I strongly encourage members of this House to support this bill. If we do not, that would mean for another decade the constituents of Vancouver South and of other ridings across Canada would be under-represented. I certainly know my constituents do not want that. They want to move toward fair representation. They support this bill and I ask all members to support it as well.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon is a beautiful riding of 30,000 square kilometres. About 120,000 people live there.

I want to thank the member from British Columbia for her excellent speech where she laid out the formula we have undertaken in this bill, with six new seats for British Columbia. We are delivering on the promises we ran on in the election campaign. I would like her to expand on the necessity for us as British Columbians to support the six additional seats, what it would mean to B.C., and why we need to pass this bill quickly so we can ensure that when we next go to the polls, British Columbia voters will be represented in numbers closer to representation by population.

Ms. Wai Young: Mr. Speaker, as we have already heard, British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario are drastically under-represented and have been for some time, decades I think I could say. Given that our population projections anticipate that the numbers will increase, under-representation will only get worse.

I am looking forward to six new seats being added for British Columbia. That would mean that instead of having, as we heard from the member for Brampton West, a constituency of 170,000 people, it would become far more manageable with a constituency of approximately 111,000 people. This is a great thing for Canada. It is a huge step forward in terms of fairer representation. We will get there in the next decennial. I would urge all members to support this bill.

• (1735)

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to the debate in the House. It has been interesting. There have been pros and cons presented and I have been listening to these arguments. This is a really important issue. It is something that needs debate and discussion in the House. It is something that also needs to go to committee so we can bring in some experts to talk to us about their thoughts on the bill.

There is one particular issue that struck me, and it has been raised in the House. That is that there has not been much consultation with the provinces on this issue. In fact, I do not think there was any consultation with the provinces. There has been discussion in the media about the bill and about this issue, yet I have seen very little from any of the premiers or representatives from the provinces. That is a big problem, one which maybe we could address at committee. Maybe we could invite those elected officials from the provinces and provincial governments to committee.

It is a big problem because we need input from the provinces on this, because we come from our home communities, our ridings, nos circonscriptions. These are located in provinces. They are located in regions and our ability or inability to properly represent our constituents, nos concitoyens, is linked very much to our provincial identities as well.

I am not trying to make an argument for regional representation in the House. That is what the other house is for. That is why we have the Senate. That is not my argument at all, but I do think that strong consultation needs to be had with the provinces, provincial governments, premiers and elected officials. We need to remember the original founding principles that even created this House, created our ridings and seat distribution in the House.

If we think about it, the House in its makeup is a direct rejection of representation by population. It is, quite frankly. When it was first conceived of for example, P.E. I. knew how to do it. P.E.I. wrote it right in that it would get four seats. Right from day one when the House sat for the first time, it was an explicit rejection of direct representation by population. We need to remember that. We need to consider the impact on the provinces and on regions, even if it is not regional representation we are actually overtly considering here in the House.

Another thing I would like to raise is that this bill is called an act for fair representation. There was some very interesting comment from my colleague across the aisle, the member for Wellington—Halton Hills, about the realities of the House, the realities that Canadians are not being fairly represented in a lot of ways, especially when we look around. The composition of the House has changed dramatically since the last election. We see many more faces from different backgrounds. We see more women. We see visible minorities, ethnic minorities, people from different types of communities that historically have not been represented in the House.

My colleague brought up the point that with the addition of more seats, especially in some of the cities where we do see more diverse populations, maybe it will flow naturally that the House will be more diverse. I disagree with that sentiment.

If we are talking about an act for fair representation, it is time for us to raise the issue in the House of a different kind of representation altogether. Maybe we need to look at systems of proportional representation. Maybe we need to look at systems where we could have different communities, overtly, consciously or specifically represented in the House, because really, there is much more to having a healthy democracy than the number of seats in the House.

Government Orders

We have to look at the health of our democracy on any number of fronts. What are the barriers to getting here? What are the social or structural barriers to getting to this place?

● (1740)

These barriers affect the ability of women, visible or ethnic minorities, Canadian expatriates, persons with disabilities, persons in the LGBTQ community, and aboriginal Canadians from fully participating in government and this form of democratic decision making. If we have a bill called the fair representation act, should we not consider these kinds of ideas and look at these barriers? What steps can we take to improve our democracy? What other areas do we have to look at for improvement?

Last March it was thrilling to see Canada ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. That was a proud day. There is one section of the convention, article 29, that says that persons with disabilities are guaranteed political rights and an ability to participate on an equal basis with all others. This is something that came up in my riding, first in theory but then in practice in the last election.

That section talks about the ability of people with disabilities to participate fully in the democratic process, yet there are still huge challenges for people with visual and physical impairments at the ballot box because we do not have national standards for accessibility when it comes to the ballot box.

I was alerted to this issue by a constituent of mine, Helen McFadyen, who said that she did not have the right to a secret ballot. Helen has a visual impairment. She always tells me that she is blind. When she goes into the ballot box, someone reads her the names and helps her out. This is nice in theory, but as she says, she does not have the right to a secret ballot. She is not afforded the dignity of being able to go in and make that decision on her own.

Even with something as simple as casting a ballot, marking that X, we are not respecting the dignity of some people. We are not allowing those people to engage with the democratic process in a way that respects their dignity. I believe that people who are visually impaired need to be able to vote independently. They need to be able to vote secretly, if that is what they want to do.

Canadians also need to be able to ratify their own vote no matter what country they may be living in, and I raise that for a reason. In talking about fairer representation, another very interesting issue has come out of my community work. It concerns expatriates, Canadian citizens who are not living in Canada.

Members may be surprised to know, and I did not realize this until I received a call from someone, that if a Canadian has been living outside Canada for more than five years, that person cannot vote in a federal election. It is hard to believe.

A friend of mine, someone I went to school with at York University, called me about this. I thought he was wrong, but when I checked, I found that he was right. This call took place during the election. I told him there was nothing I could do about it at that time and I did not think I would be able to help him get his right to vote for that election. I said we should look at this issue of democratic reform in a more robust way, when the election was over, and try to figure out a solution for the future.

Government Orders

When we talk about fair representation, how can we limit it to the issue of seats in the House? How can we just say that if we have three more seats for one province or six more seats for another province that we end up with fair representation? It is not as simple as that.

I would love to see us take this opportunity to think about truly fair representation. There are Canadian citizens living abroad who cannot vote in our elections, but our laws have an impact on them nonetheless even though they are not living in Canada. Some of our House procedures have an impact on them. A number of expatriates signed a petition to say that this is not something they agree with and that the Elections Act should be changed. Believe it or not, I cannot submit the petition because they are not residents of Canada.

I see my time for debate is coming to an end. I hope to continue this debate on another occasion.

• (1745)

The Speaker: It being 5:45, pursuant to an order made earlier today, it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill now before the House.

The question is on the amendment. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: All those in favour of the amendment will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

Some hon. members: On division.

The Speaker: I declare the amendment negated.

(Amendment negated)

The Speaker: The next question is on the main motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Speaker: Call in the members.

• (1825)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 53)

YEAS

Members

Adams	Adler
Aglukkaq	Albas
Albrecht	Alexander
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Ambler	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Armstrong	Aspin
Baird	Bateman
Benoit	Bernier
Bezan	Blaney
Block	Boughen
Braid	Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Brown (Barrie)	Butt
Calandra	Calkins
Cannan	Carmichael
Carrie	Chisu
Chong	Clarke
Clement	Daniel
Davidson	Dechert
Del Mastro	Devolin
Dreeschen	Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Dykstra	Fanning
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)	Fletcher
Galipeau	Gallant
Gill	Glover
Goguen	Goldring
Goodyear	Gosal
Gourde	Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hayes	Hiebert
Hillyer	Hoback
Hocppner	Holder
James	Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Koddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Kornaricki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauson	Leaf
Leitch	Lemieux
Leung	Lizon
Lobb	Lukiwski
Lunney	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	May
Mayes	McColeman
McLeod	Menegakis
Merrifield	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
O'Neill Gordon	Opitz
Paradis	Payne
Penashuc	Poilievre
Preston	Raït
Rajotte	Rathgeber
Reid	Rempel
Richards	Richardson
Rickford	Ritz
Saxton	Schellenberger
Seeback	Shea
Shipley	Smith
Sopuck	Sorenson
Stanton	Storseth
Strahl	Sweet
Tilson	Toet
Toews	Trost
Trotter	Twedd
Uppal	Valcourt
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vellacott	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)

Weston (Saint John)
 Williamson
 Woodworth
 Young (Oakville)
 Zimmer — 151

Wilks
 Wong
 Yelich
 Young (Vancouver South)

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews
Atamanenko	Aubin
Ayala	Belanger
Bellavance	Bennett
Benskin	Blanchette
Blanchette-Lamothe	Boivin
Brahmi	Brison
Brossseau	Byrne
Caron	Charlton
Chicoine	Choquette
Christopherson	Comartin
Côté	Cotler
Cuzner	Day
Dionne Labelle	Donnelly
Doré Lefebvre	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Easter	Eyking
Fortin	Fry
Garrison	Giguère
Goodale	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Harries (St. John's East)	Ilsu
Hughes	Jacob
Kellway	Lamoureux
Lapointe	Larose
Latendresse	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Leslie	Liu
MacAulay	Mai
Marston	Marin
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Mourani	Nantel
Nicholls	Nunez-Melo
Pacetti	Papillon
Patry	Péclét
Perreault	Plamondon
Quach	Ravignat
Raynault	Regan
Roussseau	Sandhu
Scarpalleggia	Sellah
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)	
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	
Sitsabaicsan	Stewart
Stoffer	Sullivan
Thibault	Toone
Tremblay	Valeriote — 86

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

(Bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC) moved that Bill C-217, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (mischief relating to war memorials), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Private Members' Business

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise on behalf of my constituents of Dufferin—Caledon to open the debate on my private member's bill, an act to amend the Criminal Code, which is mischief related to war memorials.

The bill seeks to add significant penalties for anyone convicted of mischief against a war memorial, cenotaph or other structure honouring or remembering those who have served in our armed forces and those who have died as a consequence of war. The timing of this debate is particularly significant, given that we pause to honour our fallen and our veterans next week on Remembrance Day.

Vandalism and defacement of a war memorial should not be tolerated in our great country. It is a duty of every Canadian citizen to respect those who have sacrificed their lives for our country. For those who do not share the same revered respect for members of our armed forces, there must be punishment.

Bill C-217 would amend the Criminal Code to make a conviction punishable by a fine of not less than \$1,000 on a first offence, imprisonment of not less than 14 days on a second offence and imprisonment of not less than 30 days on subsequent offences. Unfortunately, I feel these increased measures are necessary due to the increased amount of mischief against Canada's cenotaphs and monuments.

In November 2008 in my constituency of Dufferin—Caledon, a cenotaph was desecrated within a week of its rededication. The town of Orangeville, the community where the cenotaph is located, spent nearly \$2,000 repairing the newly restored monument just days before the annual Remembrance Day services.

Regrettably this is not the only case of mischief against cenotaphs and monuments. This type of vandalism occurs all over the country and it is for the 41st Parliament to take action. It is most concerning that in the past few years there have been numerous incidents of war memorial vandalism across the country. It is time to take a stand against this desecration of our sacred memorials and punish those responsible for this type of destruction.

Bill C-217 would place stiffer penalties on the vandalism of war memorials and hopefully force potential vandals to seriously reconsider defacing these important Canadian symbols of pride and honour. By allowing the Criminal Code to remain unchanged, we are doing a disservice to all those who have served in our wars and to all those who have sacrificed their lives so that our great country may remain free. The desecration of our war memorials must not continue. Vandals must face a harsher punishment to ensure that they will think twice before committing this type of violation.

The following are some examples of this.

In Kirkland Lake a teenager was charged with urinating on the Memorial Wall, but was able to attend a diversion program to allow the mischief charge to be dropped.

Private Members' Business

In Ottawa, our nation's capital, a man was found urinating on the National War Memorial on Canada Day. The charge was withdrawn after the culprit issued a written apology to Canadian veterans, completed community service and donated a mere \$200 to charity. After this unacceptable conduct, this criminal did not even have a mischief charge against him. This is simply unacceptable.

It is obvious that these vandals do not think about what they are doing and have not thought about the blatant disrespect they display for these memorials. We must give them something to think about. Significant fines and weeks of imprisonment will complete this objective in a way that simple apology letters and deferment programs do not.

Canadian citizens should be proud of their history and remain proud of the monuments honouring those who have given their lives so that we may remain free and not fearful that their monuments will be desecrated by thoughtless individuals.

In Toronto vandals hooked up a chain to a concrete cross and using an all-terrain vehicle, pulled it from its perch on a cenotaph. This was the second time the cross had been stolen in less than a year.

A very disturbing story was someone in Beamsville broke into the Konkle Mausoleum and emptied an urn of ashes onto the ground. Though three people are buried in the mausoleum, it is likely that the ashes belonged to a War of 1812 veteran.

In Waterloo police arrested three young people, ranging in age from 12 to 18, who were responsible for toppling between 300 and 400 graves, many of which were graves of war veterans.

• (1830)

We have heard of multiple cases in which our cherished war memorials and cenotaphs have been vandalized and disrespected. We must discourage such behaviour. Explicit punishments must be written into the Criminal Code for mischievous conduct to address these atrocious crimes. We have a duty to protect the memories of those who have sacrificed their lives so that we may continue to live freely in our great country. These memorials and what they represent command our utmost respect and efforts to preserve and protect them. Canadian citizens also deserve to know that conduct as this will not be tolerated in any way.

In a most disturbing case, on the morning of this past September 25, a Canadian Forces veteran who served in Afghanistan discovered fresh sprayed-painted graffiti tags on the monument at Girouard Park on Sherbrooke Street in Montreal's Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine neighbourhood. This was the second time in less than 18 months this beautiful monument had been defaced. What a slap in the face for the Canadian Forces member to have been the one to discover such disrespect. City workers later had to remove the offending graffiti at a cost of several thousand dollars.

Our country's bravest deserve much better. They have fought and died for our country and, therefore, deserve our utmost respect. We have an obligation to protect and preserve their dignity. Canadians as a whole deserve to know that we take our war memorials seriously and that we understand the significance they embody.

It is time for Parliament to take a stand against mischief relating to war memorials. The use of fines and imprisonment will convey this message to those who appear to have no respect for our armed forces' veterans and those who have made the ultimate sacrifice. Anyone who wilfully damages or desecrates a war memorial should face stiff consequences. We owe it to our men and women in uniform to protect these revered memorials.

The 200th anniversary of the War of 1812 will be upon us next year. As Canadians, we are extremely proud of the role that our great country played and we will soon be celebrating this important anniversary, often at the feet of our war memorials and cenotaphs. We must ensure that these memorials will still be beautiful for our ceremonies rather than desecrated by vandals on the eve of the services.

Following the anniversary for the War of 1812, the 100th anniversary of World War I will occur. Canada played an immense role in this war and this anniversary will be a time to remember all those who died defending our country and democracy. Numerous memorials throughout the country have been erected to honour those who fought in World War I. Parliament must help to ensure that these memorials remain untouched by vandalism.

With these important events around the corner, this is an opportune time to pass this legislation to protect and preserve those symbols to the best of our ability and this bill would do just that.

We all know someone who has fought for our great country: a father, a grandfather, a son, a daughter, a husband, a wife, a friend. We appreciate these men and women for the dedication they have shown to our country and for their willingness to fight abroad for our freedom here at home. Memorials in our communities are dedicated to those people and none of us should want to see them damaged or defiled. Harsher penalties will keep this from happening. They will make potential vandals think twice before acting against memorials, which so many of us consider sacred.

As all members know, this past summer the Canadian Forces wound down combat operations in Afghanistan. This was Canada's longest-ever combat mission, a mission in which our country lost 157 brave men and women of the Canadian Forces. As a result, our memorials and cenotaphs have a renewed sense of purpose and value, especially in communities which lost one or more of their own. Indeed, that conflict continues and only this past weekend Canada lost another brave soldier to a suicide attack on a NATO convoy in Kabul.

We owe so much to our men and women in uniform. Indeed, it is widely agreed that Canada came of age as a nation on the muddy battlefields of France during the First World War. Our participation in that great conflict was out of proportion to our population and we overcame challenges that had defeated other nations. Our mettle was tested, to enormous loss of life and many of our brave soldiers sacrificed everything in the defence of freedom.

• (1835)

The call came again in the Second World War, when once again tens of thousands of brave young Canadians went to the aid of our allies in the cause of freedom. That conflict reshaped our world and Canada played no small part in its outcome. From the Battle of the Atlantic to Juno Beach, from Italy to Hong Kong, Canadians were at the forefront in that conflict.

In Korea and on to the birth of UN peacekeeping with the Suez crisis, Canadians Forces continued to place their lives on the line for freedom and democracy. Through dozens of peacekeeping missions and during the long years of the Cold War, our young men and women in uniform have always been ready and willing to put country before self.

In the first Gulf War, in the Balkans, then Afghanistan and now Libya, the best of our young men and women have shown time and time again their willingness to defend Canada and our values. All too often that willingness has cost them their lives.

To honour the memory of these young men and women, our communities erect memorials and cenotaphs, and rightly so. We create honoured spaces in our cities, towns and villages where we can gather to remember them. Whether it is on Remembrance Day or any other day of the year we might choose to pause and reflect, these spaces and those memorials signify the cost of our democracy, freedom and way of life.

Those of us who enjoy the hard-won freedoms that are part of modern Canada owe it to those who have paid in blood and life to keep those honoured spaces free from harm or insult. We have a solemn duty as citizens and residents of our wonderful country to protect and preserve our memorials and cenotaphs in the memory of those who have fallen.

When vandalism occurs in one of these honoured places, we are all diminished. An act of such disrespect is offensive not only to our local veterans, but it is offensive to all those who care about those veterans and everyone who cares about the sacrifices they have made.

Bill C-217 delivers a clear message. The vandalism and desecration of any Canadian cenotaph or war memorial will not be tolerated. We are compelled to protect these revered places. We owe it all to the Canadian men and women who have fought in our armed forces.

In consultation with the Minister of Justice, I propose to move an amendment at committee, should Bill C-217 carry in second reading, that would increase the minimum penalty under indictment from my proposed five years to ten years. This is a technical amendment which would simply ensure that this new offence would be consistent with the current similar Criminal Code offence of section 430(1)(a), which criminalizes the wilful destruction or damage of

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property. Without this amendment, we would be creating inconsistencies within the existing legislative framework.

I urge all of my colleagues to consider the adoption of Bill C-217. The desecration of war memorials is something that can happen in any community at any time. We all owe it to the constituents of our ridings, especially to the veterans of our respective ridings, to support the passage of the bill. This amendment to the Criminal Code would help protect Canada's war memorials and cenotaphs from vandalism, defilement and damage. Those who have fought and died in our great country deserve to know that the 41st Parliament is working to protect the monuments and memorials erected in their honour.

As I said at the outset, all colleagues in the House will join millions of Canadians next week on Remembrance Day as we honour those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice to keep Canada the true north strong and free. Our long and proud tradition of standing up to defend freedom and democracy and to defend our values is one of the things that makes Canada the greatest country in the world today. We are a free, open and democratic society that prides itself on the rule of law. Those who would disrespect our honoured community spaces that are dedicated to the remembrance of the fallen through vandalism or other such acts must be held to account under the law. The debt we owe our veterans and the fallen soldiers requires that we look upon any disrespect to our cenotaphs and war memorials as a deeply grave matter with very serious consequences.

I believe that the passage of Bill C-217 is necessary to ensure that those who would damage our honoured places think twice before they act to desecrate our war memorials and cenotaphs. I encourage all of my colleagues in the House to join me in taking decisive action on this important issue.

• (1840)

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I admire the passion my hon. colleague from the Conservatives has for this event. He is correct when he says that nobody in Canada and nobody in this House wishes to see any monuments defaced in any way, shape or form.

We all know about the incident a couple of years ago, I believe, when some rowdy teenagers, who were drunk or stoned, urinated on the National War Memorial and how that caused national news. They did not go to jail. The Legion asked for a chance to talk to them, and it did. Now these kids are the biggest protectors of war monuments in the country. The bill proposes that we incarcerate them immediately.

We heard testimony today in our veterans committee about how a Japanese monument in Vancouver was continually defaced and defiled. Eventually, the Legion and other groups got together with the people who did it. Now those kids are the biggest protectors of that monument.

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I understand what my hon. colleague is trying to achieve but, if the Royal Canadian Legion and other groups believe that education and an opportunity to explain to vandals why their actions are wrong and to convert them into protecting these monuments, would that not be a more cost-effective and humane manner to deal with this issue?

Mr. David Tilson: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his comments but I do not know that I necessarily agree with him.

I spent considerable time researching the damage that has been done from sea to sea to sea, mainly from the east coast to the west coast. It is incredible, over the recent years, the amount of damage. I suppose we could find a couple of cases where that has happened, and it may be the one that I referred to in Ottawa where something happened on Canada Day when someone did something disgusting to the monuments.

I am only suggesting minimum penalties. It would leave room for the courts, if they wished, to do the things that the member is recommending these young people do. It is generally young men but it could be older people. In the cases that I have seen, they are all ages. It is young offenders, people in their 20s and people in their 30s, and generally they are intoxicated.

This bill would tell them that if they do that they had better think twice because they will go to jail and receive a tough fine. This bill would tell them that these are places of our sacred institutions that honour our soldiers and honour our whole way of life and they cannot do that because it is wrong.

• (1845)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the passion and sense of commitment that the member opposite brings to what he believes is an important issue and that, no doubt, Canadians as a whole would recognize as an important issue. We have this beautiful memorial in the form of a wall mural in Winnipeg North and there is a high sense of pride in the role that Sergeant Tommy Prince played in World War II.

The concern that I have is very similar to the question that was just asked. We have monuments, war memorials and wall murals. I wonder if we might be doing a better service by just emphasizing to the people who are vandalizing and graffiti those things how horrific those types of actions are. Is it possible that it might be a bit too extreme when there might be some—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please.

The hon. member for Dufferin—Caledon.

Mr. David Tilson: Mr. Speaker, both questions are similar.

I have a whole binder of offences that I have collected from coast to coast describing these terrible offences that have happened to our cenotaphs and war memorials and they are treated as mischief and the offenders receive general mischief charges. A war memorial is for the people who have died giving us our freedom and to protect our country, for those who have fought wars and been in peacekeeping, from the War of 1812 to the incidents in Libya. When a war memorial is defiled, surely to goodness, we want to treat those as more than just mischief charges.

I understand the member's thoughts. The judges would have discretion. They would be minimum sentences. They would not be

soft charges but I believe this is something greater than a mischief charge, and this bill would make these charges greater.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for bringing forth this issue for debate. Clearly, he has demonstrated a great deal of passion, interest and respect for our veterans, whether they go back to the War of 1812, to the recent events in Afghanistan or to peacekeeping efforts where we have, unfortunately, seen the loss of lives of people from our country engaged in war on behalf of the country.

I am wearing a poppy, as many of our colleagues are, to show respect for our veterans. As the member said, next week we will be attending services in our communities to show respect for our veterans and to acknowledge their contributions. We will be there because we choose to be there. I believe every person in the House has a great deal of respect for veterans and for our serving soldiers. I was born before Confederation, and I was born in a place that was not part of Canada. There has not been a time in my lifetime when there has not been the kind of respect for serving soldiers and veterans as there is today.

Members will know that in the last 10 or 15 years there has been more public attendance at war memorials where people are showing interest, concern and respect for veterans and the contributions they have made, as well as the contributions that serving soldiers make. This is the context in which the member brings forth the legislation and I respect his views in bringing that forward.

However, I will talk about the context a little more because of something a member said that is very important. The member said that young people or anyone should think twice before disrespecting or defacing a war memorial. My colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore, who is the veterans critic for our party and is a tireless, if I may use that term, advocate for veterans ever since he has been in the House, pointed out that many people do not even think once before doing something, as the member was talking about, either showing disrespect or, in some cases, actually defacing a war memorial.

He also said that this amendment was necessary in order to avoid inconsistencies in the law. Reflecting on that, I would like to comment on the section that we are talking about, section 430 of the Criminal Code, which is the mischief section.

"Mischief" is defined in section 430 as:

Every one commits mischief who wilfully

- (a) destroys or damages property;
- (b) renders property dangerous, useless, inoperative or ineffective;
- (c) obstructs, interrupts or interferes with the lawful use, enjoyment or operation of property; or
- (d) obstructs, interrupts or interferes with any person in the lawful use, enjoyment or operation of property.

It is a broad definition of what mischief is.

There are other aspects to it but if someone commits mischief that endangers a person's life, that person is guilty of an indictable offence and is liable to imprisonment for life. Therefore, the maximum penalty is life imprisonment.

In terms of other types of property, if the property is of a certain type, the general penalty for mischief is that the person is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years. Therefore, the maximum penalty for mischief is two years imprisonment. In a proper case, the judge could actually put someone in jail for two years for committing mischief.

If the offence proceeds on summary conviction, which is another way of proceeding, the person can be guilty of an offence punishable on summary conviction. The penalty for that is a \$5,000 fine or six months in jail. Therefore, depending on whether it proceeds by indictment or proceeds by summary conviction, the fine can be as much as \$5,000, six months in jail or two years in jail.

• (1850)

The Criminal Code also deals with other types of property. So, for mischief in relation to certain other types of property the penalties are increased.

What the member is saying is that this is a special type of property, sacred to our veterans and sacred to all of us because of the nature of the property's design to honour those who died in the service of their country, and, therefore, there should be a greater penalty than ordinary mischief. Two years maximum is not enough, summary conviction, \$5,000 fine or six months is not enough.

Here is how the Criminal Code deals with other types of property. One of them is what they call testamentary instruments, a will. If someone destroys the last will and testament of a person trying to leave his or her property to the people that he or she wants, the punishment is a maximum of 10 years. It goes from 2 to 10 years maximum penalty for destruction of a testamentary instrument that is proceeded by indictment.

There is another type of property here. It seems to me, and I know the member may be able to enlighten us, that the legislative draftsman, the legislative counsel or whoever drafted this bill, probably looked at this section to draft that one. This section reads:

Mischief relating to religious property

Every one who commits mischief in relation to property that is a building, structure or part thereof that is primarily used for religious worship including a church, mosque, synagogue or temple, or an object associated with religious worship...

Nothing could be more sacred than that.

... if the commission of the mischief is motivated by bias, prejudice or hate based on religion, race, colour or national or ethnic origin,

(a) is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding ten years; or

(b) is guilty of an offence punishable on summary conviction and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding eighteen months.

Therefore, a summary conviction is 18 months instead of 6 and indictable is 10 instead of 2. However, it is not just defacing a church, destroying a church, urinating on church grounds, in a cemetery or whatever, the motivation has to be based on bias, prejudice, or hate based on religion, race or colour. In other words, if someone puts a swastika on a synagogue with spray paint, if that is done based on bias, prejudice, or hate based on religion, race, colour,

then the offence is considered extremely serious and the person is liable to punishment for a term not exceeding 10 years or, by summary conviction, a maximum of 18 months.

In none of those cases, testamentary instrument or otherwise, is there a specified fine, or imprisonment or term, but the maximums are increased. In the case of testamentary instrument, it is by 5 times, to 10 years. In the case of a synagogue, or church, or a mosque or other religious site, it is up to 10 years, or 18 months for a summary conviction if there is proof of hatred, bias or prejudice.

That is the way the Criminal Code deals with matters that our society considers more sacred than ordinary property. If I were to I scratch a car with a key while walking past the car committing vandalism, that is mischief in relation to property. It brings a maximum sentence of two years or, by indictment, a \$5,000 fine or six months in jail. However, if I destroy a will, deface a church or a synagogue with prejudice then the punishment goes up.

What the member is proposing here is something a little different. If we want consistency we might have to do something a little different than that.

I understand the concern the member has raised and we share that concern. If this is something so widespread by people who are wilfully doing this then we will certainly need to think about whether this is the appropriate way to deal with it.

• (1855)

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in support, in principle, of Bill C-217, which is an act to amend the Criminal Code, particularly with respect to mischief relating to war memorials, which was introduced by the member for Dufferin—Caledon on June 15.

The bill would effectively create a new crime, where a person commits mischief in relation to war memorials and similar monuments honouring those who died during the war, by introducing a new paragraph to section 430 of the Criminal Code.

As the member for Dufferin—Caledon put it, this debate takes place at an appropriate moment of remembrance. It takes place on the eve of our commemoration of Remembrance Day, where we remember those who are no longer with us; where we remember those who, as the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore put it in this House, gave the greatest gift of all, the gift of life, so that we may live and so that we may enjoy our liberty; where we pay tribute to the veterans among us, and their families, who reflect and represent the sacrifice of those who are no longer with us, and we honour them; and where we pay tribute to our men and women in uniform across this world who are protecting our fundamental rights, who are safeguarding our democracy, who are protecting our human security or, indeed, who are protecting our international peace and security.

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In effect, in 2005, when I was minister of justice and attorney general, I, at that point, developed a national justice initiative with respect to combatting hatred and racism which spoke with respect to the danger of this kind of assault on our war memorials, of those kinds of hate crimes that end up being an assault on the inherent dignity of every human being, and an assault on our equal dignity and, indeed, on our character as a multicultural society.

Section 430 of the Criminal Code currently outlines the definition of mischief and associated penalties. The section also includes specific provisions for mischief relating to data, religious and cultural property, and their associated penalties.

Bill C-217 would add another specific provision; this one for mischief, as I said, related to war memorials. It would also outline possible sentences for a person convicted of such a crime and it would create, as well, mandatory minimum sentences.

It is important to recall that the member for Ottawa South, at the time, in 2006, first proposed that the newly-elected Conservative government pass a law to make damage done to war memorials a specific offence. This push to protect monuments came in the wake of an incident on Canada Day in 2006, in which a man and two youths were observed urinating on Canada's National War Memorial in Ottawa. The man involved in the incident has since had his mischief charged dropped after partaking in voluntary community service.

I mention this because it would seem to me that the appropriate response with respect to that kind of vandalism is not to institute a mandatory minimum but to respond by way of community work, by way of education, by way of having to meet with veterans and confronting exactly the nature of the outrage that was committed and thereby learning from that. That would be a more appropriate remedy than introducing a mandatory minimum.

Since the member for Ottawa South introduced his proposal, there were other incidents involving monument vandalism, including an incident of a cross being torn from the cenotaph at a Royal Canadian Legion in Bell Ewart. At the time, in 2006, the then justice minister was not yet prepared to accept the proposal of the member for Ottawa South.

That leads us to where we are today with a related initiative to the recent passing of Bill C-442, An Act to establish a National Holocaust Monument, a monument which is intended for us to recall and remember horrors too terrible to be believed but not too terrible to have happened.

• (1900)

The importance, therefore, of protecting war memorials and the dignity of the individuals they represent and the values of freedom, democracy and human rights are omnipresent in this regard.

I support the need for an initiative to have a specific law protective of war memorials to express the condemnation of society of those who deface those monuments and memorials that are dedicated to our veterans, to our soldiers, and to the victims of mass atrocities, both domestic and international. But I caution as to the use of a mandatory minimum with respect to a remedial approach regarding this offence.

I support the bill in principle. I trust that the member for Dufferin—Caledon may perhaps be open to amending the bill with respect to removing the mandatory minimum, whereby we proceed in terms of alternative forms of punishment. I trust that a further discussion of the bill could lead us in the direction of where we could support the principle, certainly, which is very compelling.

I commend the member for introducing this private member's bill, but that we tailor the remedy with respect to the offence to the individual and do so in a manner that we can achieve an outcome that may be more appropriate in that regard while still achieving the objective which we seek.

Again, may I close by saying it is an appropriate initiative on the eve of Remembrance Day.

• (1905)

Ms. Eve Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to support Bill C-217, which was introduced in the House by the hon. member for Dufferin—Caledon on June 15 of this year. When the hon. member introduced the bill, he said that he did so in an effort to add significant penalties for anyone convicted of mischief against a war memorial, cenotaph, or other structure intended to honour or remember those who had died as a result of war.

Anyone who intentionally damages or defiles a war memorial should face severe consequences. Respect for those who have given the ultimate sacrifice so that we may live in peace is the responsibility of every Canadian. We owe it to our men and women in uniform to protect these revered memorials. I suspect that many Canadians would share these sentiments.

While some Canadians may question why Parliament should create this new Criminal Code offence when the code already contains similar provisions dealing with mischief against property generally, I commend the hon. member's effort to create a new offence specifically relating to war memorials and cenotaphs.

Through my remarks today, I intend to explain why the creation of the new criminal offence that distinguishes war memorials and similar structures from other property is justified and should be supported by all members of the House.

War memorials have an especially important place in Canadian society. Their desecration disrespects the memory of Canadians who gave the ultimate sacrifice for freedom and disrespects Canadians who continue to serve our country today.

As members may know, the National War Memorial here in Ottawa was unveiled in 1939 by King George VI on the eve of the second world war to symbolize the response of Canadians in the first world war that ended on November 11, 1918. Of course, it has since come to commemorate the sacrifice of all Canadians who have served in times of war.

Under the Criminal Code, a person commits mischief who: wilfully destroys or damages property; renders property dangerous, useless, inoperable, or ineffective; obstructs, interrupts, or interferes with the lawful use, enjoyment or operation of property; or obstructs, interrupts, or interferes with any person in the lawful use, enjoyment, or operation of property.

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Where a property that is the object of the mischief has a value greater than \$5,000, the Criminal Code provides that where the Crown proceeds by indictment, the maximum penalty is 10 years imprisonment, and where the Crown elects to proceed by way of summary conviction, the maximum penalty is six months imprisonment. There is no mandatory minimum penalty for mischief.

Bill C-217 proposes the creation of a new hybrid Criminal Code offence of mischief committed in relation to property that is a building, structure, or part thereof, that primarily serves as a monument to honour persons who were killed or died as a consequence of war, including a war memorial or a cenotaph. The bill further proposes that this new offence would be punishable by a maximum of 18 months imprisonment on summary conviction and five years imprisonment when prosecuted by indictment.

Members will note that the bill also proposes the creation of mandatory minimum penalties. There would be a \$1,000 fine for a first offence that would be the same whether the Crown proceeds by indictment or by way of summary conviction. I think this perhaps addresses some of the concerns that we have heard from the opposition.

This \$1,000 minimum offence in real terms would be about 100 hours of work at the current minimum wage in Ontario. I do not think it is unreasonable if someone has desecrated a war memorial to ask them to go and work for 100 hours in as much as we do ask them to go out and provide volunteer community services. In addition to that, if a judge wanted to ask the perpetrator to go out and speak to Legions, I think that would be eminently reasonable.

What we are debating today, and which I fully support, is the fact that we would separately and uniquely honour our war memorials and cenotaphs.

On a second offence, there would be a minimum of 14 days of imprisonment and 30 days imprisonment for a third or subsequent offence. These mandatory minimum penalties are similar to some that already exist in the Criminal Code.

For example, section 255 of the Criminal Code also provides for mandatory minimum penalties that would be the same whether the Crown proceeds by indictment or by way of summary conviction. Under that provision the offender is liable to a \$1,000 fine for a first offence, 30 days imprisonment for a second offence, and 120 days imprisonment for a third and subsequent offence.

• (1910)

In preparing for today's debate, I had a quick look at some incidents that could come within the scope of this new legislation. Members will be aware that there have been a number of high-profile incidents involving the desecration of monuments and war memorials in the recent past. While these incidents are relatively rare, they have nevertheless been very disturbing to Canadians.

A war memorial in Coniston, Ontario, has been the target of vandals a number of times over the years. The memorial originally consisted of five walls. There was a wall for the navy, one for the merchant navy, one for the army, one for the air force and one for the RCMP. At one point the monument had 11 flagpoles; only six remain now, and these too have been vandalized. The tops have been broken off and the flags have been stolen. Vandals also tore plaques

off the central wall and knocked down the navy's wall. Two plane propellers that stand guard by the air force wall of the memorial had previously been spray painted.

At one point the Legion had a helmet and a gun from the world wars in a shatterproof glass display case at the memorial, yet vandals damaged the case so badly that the items had to be given away to another legion that could safely display them. A stainless steel sword dating back to the 1940s had also been stolen from a nearby cenotaph.

As a result of the most recent incident, the monument now needs to be completely replaced because of the amount of destruction, and I understand that the Legion is not going to repair it.

We must remember that our cenotaphs and monuments are powerful reminders of the sacrifices that generations of Canadians have made for the peace and freedom we enjoy today. I am proud to be a part of a government that understands that cenotaphs and monuments are important gathering places within our communities. As Canadians, we have a duty as a nation to preserve them in honour of our fallen men and women. Our veterans and those who continue to serve Canada today deserve nothing less.

This legislation underscores the importance of monuments and memorials to Canadians as symbols that remind us of our most important values: democracy, freedom and tolerance. I would invite all members of the House to support this important legislation, especially as we approach Remembrance Day.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for bringing forward this legislation and especially for timing it prior to the week of Remembrance Day. Certain points of his discussion were very sympathetic and understandable, and I appreciate his thoughtful concern regarding our veterans and their families with regard to the desecration of war memorials and cenotaphs throughout this country.

I do not think a Canadian exists who is not disgusted when seeing stupid acts against commemorative monuments of any kind. There was a cross-burning recently in Enfield, Nova Scotia. Everyone was very disgusted by it, and it was dealt with appropriately.

There should be a touch of caution on this. It is easy to say this is what we want to do and move forward with it. When reading a headline, giving a personal point of view or explaining it to constituents, most people would say, "Yes, let's do this, it's a great idea". However, there are technical concerns that need to be looked at.

Other forms of vandalism and mischief can happen. For example, let us say three very drunk people leave a pub and desecrate a war memorial. That just happened in Ottawa at the National War Memorial. People were outraged, no question about it, and they wanted heads to roll, but the Royal Canadian Legion had a different approach to it. These young kids, having talked to members of the Royal Canadian Legion and veterans, are now the biggest and proudest supporters of the National War Memorial.

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Similarly, the Veterans Affairs committee heard today from Mr. Terence Whitty regarding a Japanese memorial in Vancouver that was consistently desecrated until the police were able to find who did it. They got hold of the kids and spoke to them so that they understood what they had done wrong; these kids are now the biggest supporters of monuments and understand the sacrifices of our men and women.

My hon. colleague knows full well the sacrifices made by our men and women in the services for many years, but we do not teach that in our schools. That is a major problem with our schools. They do not teach military history. An awful lot of people have no idea what happened to these men and women. They know on Remembrance Day because it is a time for reflection, but on November 12 it is completely forgotten. That is problem number one. A lot of kids are doing things because they have not thought them out properly. It does not compute in their minds.

However, there is another form of desecration of a cenotaph, and that is neglect. There are thousands of memorials across the country. If cenotaphs, plaques or monuments are neglected, they start breaking apart or moss grows around them, and they become unfortunate, unsightly edifices in that regard. Who is responsible for the neglect? It is not someone who desecrated something. This is desecration by neglect. Is someone held responsible for that? Does someone pay a fine or go to jail for that? The bill does not say.

As much as I sympathize with and appreciate the concerns of the hon. member, the matter is worthy of further discussion. I would like to get validation from the various organizations in this country. I do not think I heard from the hon. member what the Royal Canadian Legion said, or the army, navy, air force, veterans associations, or UN peacekeepers. It would be very interesting to hear what they have to say about the legislation. It would be worthy of debate.

The other concern about establishing mandatory minimums is that doing so sometimes takes away a judge's opportunity to do something in that regard, depending on the circumstances of the day. Hypothetically, if three kids who were not born in Canada came here, did something really stupid and had no idea about what they were doing, what would we do with them? It can sometimes be related to swatting a fly with a sledgehammer. I sympathize with the hon. member's concerns, but we want to make sure we do it right. We want to make sure that education and rehabilitation are number one. Incarceration and major fines are not always the answer in these circumstances.

Although I have never desecrated a cenotaph or done anything of that nature, I have done some childish things in my lifetime. My father took his belt off of his waist and gave me a licking of a lifetime when I was in trouble. I know we do not hear the word "licking" very often in here, but that is what he did. I guarantee that I did not have to go to jail to know that I had done something wrong, and very bad.

• (1915)

In combination with this bill, there are other opportunities to show people who have done this that what they have done is severely wrong and to make sure that it never, ever happens again. There are thousands of monuments across the country and internationally. How do we apply these laws in fairness to what is going on?

Let us start teaching military history in our schools so that everyone knows why there are cenotaphs. I walk by the national cenotaph every morning and every night going to and from my apartment. When I stop people and ask them if they know what the horses, people and animals mean, they do not have a clue. Some of them are from Ottawa. They know it is a national monument, but they do not understand the makeup of the monument and why it was put there. A lot of people's actions are based on ignorance. They simply do not know.

A lot of people do not know there is a national aboriginal cenotaph at Confederation Park. It is beautiful to look at, but many people have no clue what it means. We have the Korean one, the Hong Kong one, and the one for peacekeeping. They are beautiful. When I ask people walking by what the cenotaph represents, they have no clue.

If we are going to punish people for a malicious act originating from stupidity and ignorance, maybe there is an alternative. Maybe we could turn that type of behaviour around. Maybe we could use a belt, and if my dad were still alive he would do that. Maybe I would use a belt myself, because I know how disgusted I am when I see actions of that nature not just when it comes to cenotaphs, but stupid things that happen all the time. Vandalism happens in this country all the time for stupid reasons. The question is do we incarcerate everyone who commits these acts? That is a valid question and it is worthy of further debate.

I appreciate the fact that the hon. member has brought this legislation forward, but as the hon. member for Mount Royal and my hon. colleague from St. John's East indicated, there are certain concerns and procedures that we need to look. I appreciate the intent of what the member is trying to do. We need to prevent these actions from happening again. We need to determine the best way to prevent them from happening again. If they do happen again, we need to ensure that people understand the seriousness of their actions and make sure they do not do it again.

If we could have that dialogue, I think we could achieve what the hon. member is trying to do.

As we say across the country,

At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.

Let us forget.

• (1920)

Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, how privileged we are to live in Canada. Canada is free from the turmoil and strife that we see in so many other parts of the world. Many new Canadians have come to Canada to escape war. Surely they appreciate the freedom and security which we should never take for granted.

Adjournment Proceedings

Soon it will once again be Remembrance Day, November 11, notably this year, the 11th day of the 11th month of the 11th year of this century. Canadians have a moral duty to acknowledge the courage and sacrifice of those Canadians who placed themselves in harm's way, stood against oppression, and gave their all in the defence of freedom, justice and peace not just for Canada, but for people in foreign lands as well.

Most Canadians are conscious of the great debt we owe to those who contributed so much to preserving Canadian values, like the rule of law and equality. They wear the red poppy as I do this evening with solemn pride.

This is why I am at a loss to understand why there are some people who commit what can only be called despicable acts of vandalism against those memorials that have been erected to honour their sacrifice. I certainly support education, as the member opposite has suggested, but this really is a more straightforward matter.

As an example, in 2006, vandals ripped the cross from the cenotaph at Branch 547 of the Royal Canadian Legion in Belle Ewart, a small hamlet south of Barrie on Lake Simcoe. When we hear of acts of vandalism committed against a war memorial, I think many of us react with a mixture of sadness and outrage.

I would not want anyone to think that this problem is unique to Canada. Unfortunately, I recently have learned that scores of memorials to Britain's brave war dead have been desecrated by callous looters and vandals in the United Kingdom. The contempt for Britain's heroes was highlighted last week when a four foot bronze statue of a Second World War soldier was stolen from the garrison town of Tidworth in Wiltshire.

Brass statues and plaques bearing the names of the fallen are being ripped from their fittings and melted down so they can be sold for scrap. These plaques are often the last personal link with some of the fallen. If they are lost and their names forgotten, then it dilutes everything Remembrance Day stands for.

In the U.K., soaring prices for metals like copper, which has seen a threefold increase in value since 2009, has led to railway lines, phone lines, as well as war memorials and statues being targeted by metal thieves. These are deliberate acts.

In fact, I understand that at least three treasured monuments are looted, vandalized or in fact destroyed every week. This has left communities across the United Kingdom outraged, and rightly so, at the appalling insult to the heroes of two world wars. There are also growing calls for tighter laws to halt the plunder of memorials and tougher sentences for those who wilfully desecrate them in that part of the world.

I would like to invite all hon. members to consider how the families of Canadian service personnel, men and women, must feel when they witness or hear of similar acts of desecration being committed in Canada.

One hopes that all of our institutions, including schools, continue to instil proper appreciation of the role the Canadian Forces have played and are continuing to play in preserving our way of life.

It is my fervent hope that Bill C-217, once enacted, will help deter those who might engage in such outrageous conduct in the future.

I agree with my colleague, the hon. member for Dufferin—Caledon, that it is important to distinguish mischief against a war memorial, cenotaph or other such structure intended to honour or remember those who have died as a result of war from mischief to other types of property. War memorials deserve special recognition.

Bill C-217 provides that where a person has been found guilty of an offence punishable on summary conviction, that person is liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 18 months.

• (1925)

Furthermore, Bill C-217 proposes that where a person has been found guilty of the indictable offence of mischief committed in relation to a war memorial or cenotaph, that person would be liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding five years.

Bill C-217 also provides for mandatory minimum sentences that would be the same whether the Crown proceeds by indictment or by way of summary conviction. That is a very important point.

My colleagues opposite made it sound as though imprisonment would be the automatic minimum sentence in these situations. That is not correct. A first offence would entail a minimum \$1,000 fine, no imprisonment. However, for a second offence, the offender would be liable to 14 days' imprisonment. For a third or subsequent offence, if this has happened by the same accused three times, the offender would face a minimum of 30 days' imprisonment.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper. The hon. parliamentary secretary will have four minutes remaining when the House returns to this matter.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at our last late show the parliamentary secretary claimed that the government has a tangible plan to address climate change. However, federal and provincial government actions that have been announced or are already under way are projected to reduce submissions by only one-quarter of what is needed to meet the 2020 target. Will the parliamentary secretary tell Canadians tonight how the government plans to address the remaining three-quarters?

Adjournment Proceedings

Canadians should be highly critical of the government's abdication of leadership on issues related to climate change, specifically its performance in meeting international climate commitments, setting science-based emission reduction targets, developing incentives for low-carbon technologies, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, pricing carbon, and studying and putting in place adaptation measures necessary to respond to the risks of climate change.

This past Tuesday, the parliamentary secretary said that Environment Canada will not close the World Ozone and Ultraviolet Radiation Data Centre. Since the centre is manned by only one person, will the parliamentary secretary confirm tonight that that person has had his or her workplace adjustment letter rescinded? The parliamentary secretary explained this past Tuesday that Canada has an international obligation to monitor ozone in the upper atmosphere and previously confirmed there would be no cuts to upper level monitoring.

Repeatedly, I have asked what would happen to monitoring in the lower atmosphere, and repeatedly the parliamentary secretary has declined to address the question. Will the parliamentary secretary commit tonight to maintain lower atmospheric monitoring of ozone at the current levels of activity? The parliamentary secretary recognizes that Canada has been and is a global leader in ozone science. How then can she turn her back on our world-leading scientists, such as Dr. David Tarasick? Why does she not fight for them and stand up for protecting our environment?

Antarctica has an ozone hole the size of North America over it. The Canadian Arctic had a hole the size of Ontario over it. Will she commit tonight to rescind the workplace adjustment letters of Dr. Tarasick and other ozone researchers?

The parliamentary secretary's claim that changing the way ozone is monitored in Canada does not mean that Canada's ability to monitor ozone would be degraded is simply not the case. Two different ozone-monitoring networks, Brewer and ozonesonde, measure two different aspects of the atmosphere and both are needed. The system is, to use the government's terms, already integrated and optimized.

The parliamentary secretary finally admitted that integrating ozone-monitoring networks and changing the management of the World Ozone and Ultraviolet Radiation Data Centre will mean reducing the number of employees dedicated to ozone science. Does the parliamentary secretary appreciate what is at stake, that the ozone problem is a global problem like climate change, and that it requires vigilant monitoring? The government is failing on climate change. Will it fail on ozone too?

• (1930)

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her enthusiasm and passion on this issue. I can assure her that I also share her commitment to ensuring that we have world-class ozone monitoring data in Canada and continuing our reputation of doing so.

As I have assured my colleague numerous times in recent weeks, Environment Canada will continue to monitor the ozone. The World Ozone and Ultraviolet Radiation Data Centre will continue to deliver

world-class results. We will also strive to ensure that we are wise stewards of taxpayer dollars while doing so.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, we have world-leading scientists, but it will be extremely difficult for them to maintain their global leadership when scientific positions are cut, technological capabilities are reduced and atmospheric monitoring is cut back.

Will the parliamentary secretary heed the requests from international scientists, leading Canadian atmospheric scientists and thousands of Canadians who want the cuts reversed, or will the government continue to be on the wrong side of this issue, leaving behind a legacy of damage that will take a generation to repair?

Changing one's position in light of overwhelming evidence is not a sign of weakness, but rather an indication that the government is willing to respond to science and the facts.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, Canada's excellent track record of providing ozone monitoring data will continue, as will our ongoing work to take concrete action to protect Canada's environment.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am pursuing a question I asked the Minister of the Environment some time ago to which I received a response from the parliamentary secretary. The question was about a policy that was put in place in 2007 by the current government to limit access to journalists to scientists working within the Canadian government. This extends beyond the environmental portfolio. It affects scientists at the National Research Council and scientists working for Natural Resources Canada and Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

In point of fact, the Canadian Science Writers' Association, a national organization, wrote to all federal leaders earlier this spring, expressing its concern that this policy of muzzling scientists had led to its calculation of an 80% drop in media coverage of the climate crisis. I will just list some examples.

I mentioned Dr. Kristina Miller in my initial question. She is a Department of Fisheries and Oceans scientist and is very proud of the fact that her research in science was published in this leading international prestigious journal. She was not allowed to speak to media by her department.

An Environment Canada team published a paper on April 5, in the *Geophysical Research Letters*, that concluded that a very dangerous rise in global CO₂ increases, leading to a 2° global average temperature increase, was quite likely and might be unavoidable. Those scientists were also not allowed to speak to the media.

Scientists who were working on radiation monitoring in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear disaster in Japan were requested to provide data to the news media about radiation monitoring and readings. That request to Health Canada was denied.

Adjournment Proceedings

We also know there was an almost amusing story of a journalist attempting to reach an NRC scientist based in Victoria, whose research had been published internationally. This research related to a flood 13,000 years ago. That researcher was not allowed to speak to the media.

Then there is the very recent story of Dr. David Tarasick, referred to just moments ago by my colleague from Etobicoke North, who has been doing important research on ozone monitoring. That work, along with work by other international colleagues, was published in the prestigious journal *Nature*. It pointed out that a quite unprecedented ozone hole had opened up over the northern Arctic. We have heard of the ozone hole over Antarctica, which has been monitored and recorded since the mid-1980s. However, this was the first and historically unprecedented hole opening up over the Arctic. Interestingly enough, Dr. Tarasick was allowed to provide an interview to the media. It was a supervised interview with Environment Canada personnel present at all times, trying to steer him away from answering certain questions, but at least the interview was granted.

It is also troubling to me that as a member of Parliament, for the first time in my life when I contact scientists within the Government of Canada, they are no longer able to communicate with me. I have had them explain by emails that they will check and get back to me whether they are allowed to answer my question. In some cases, these are colleagues I have known for decades and because I am a member of Parliament, they are not allowed to answer my questions.

I ask the hon. parliamentary secretary this. How can the Canadian public have confidence in a government that does not allow its scientists to speak to the public, a public that is so proud of their research, that wants to keep Canadian research in the forefront on climate change, on ozone depletion, on fisheries science? How can we have confidence?

• (1935)

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to deal in facts and statistics tonight as well.

First, our department continually makes its experts available to both the media and members opposite, with ministers also acting as principal spokespersons for their respective departments.

However, since January 2011, officials at Environment Canada have completed over 1,000 media interviews. Specifically relating to science, we have provided 600 interviews with departmental scientists. We respond to requests from media for scientific information in a responsive manner. In fact, this year alone, we have met over 80% of reporters, often with very tight deadlines, and we were able to respond to 98% of the requests. Canadians know because of this they can count on Environment Canada for the information that they need.

We are also committed to sharing information with all Canadians about what is happening in the environment around them. That is

why we take pride in the accomplishments of our excellent team at Environment Canada and the results that they deliver. Those results include: a sector by sector plan to align with the U.S. and achieve a 17% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2020; addressing concerns with the sustainable development of the oil sands; and a world-class monitoring plan that focuses on water, air quality and biodiversity. We will continue to implement this plan with our team and with our partners in the provinces, industry and other stakeholder groups so Canadians can be assured of the environmental sustainability of our oil and gas industry.

We have also worked closely with provinces, territories, Health Canada, industry and environmental and health groups to develop things like the national air quality management system. This system will include new air quality standards that will improve the air quality for the environment and the health of all Canadians. These are tangible results that our team at Environment Canada is producing and these are tangible results it is communicating to the media.

We are committed to ensuring that Canada's natural heritage is protected, while being cognizant of the need to be wise stewards of taxpayer dollars and to protect our country's fragile economic recovery.

• (1940)

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, could the hon. parliamentary secretary provide any rationale whatsoever for why this policy was brought in, in the first place in 2007? We have had Environment Canada operational in the country going back to 1970. At no time between 1970 and 2007 did any government feel it was necessary to have media, representatives and journalists go through a star chamber process to get access to our scientists. They could pick up a phone, send an email and get an interview with the scientists and researchers across the country.

What possible rationale is there for having this process at all, which often requires that our journalists go to scientists in other countries to get answers about work that has been done within Canada?

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Again, Mr. Speaker, to deal in facts, since January of this year, over 1,000 interviews have been conducted by officials at Environment Canada and over 600 interviews have been provided by departmental scientists. This shows that we are engaging with the Canadian public, as is our role, but that we are also providing tangible, quality, action-oriented results regarding the protection of Canada's environment, and this is something of which our government is very proud.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:41 p.m.)

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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Friday, November 4, 2011

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, November 4, 2011

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1005)

[English]

SECURITY OF TENURE OF MILITARY JUDGES ACT

Hon. Bev Oda (for the Minister of National Defence) moved that Bill C-16, An Act to amend the National Defence Act (military judges), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I stand this morning with great pleasure in support of a bill that addresses the urgent need to ensure the proper functioning of our military justice system.

I will begin by reminding all members that our debate—

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order, and I do apologize to my hon. colleague. I should inform you that there have been consultations and I am hopeful that the House will give its consent to the following motion: That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practices of the House, when the House begins debate on the second reading motion of Bill C-16, an Act to Amend the National Defence Act (military judges), one member from each recognized party and the member from Saanich—Gulf Islands, who shall divide her time with any of the following members, the member for Richmond—Arthabaska, the member for Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, the member for Ahuntsic, and the member for Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, may speak to the second reading motion, after which the said bill shall be deemed to have been read a second time and referred to a committee of the whole, deemed considered in committee of the whole, deemed reported without amendment, deemed concurred in at report stage and deemed read a third time and passed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Does the hon. parliamentary secretary have the unanimous consent of the House to present the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Chris Alexander: Mr. Speaker, I rise again in support of the bill that addresses the urgent need to ensure the proper functioning of our military justice system.

The bill comes to us in the context of two facts that I think all hon. members will recognize. One, a legal circumstance that places additional pressure on all of us to ensure the smooth functioning of our military justice system, one that has served Canada well for decades. We just celebrated the centenary of the Office of the Judge Advocate General without a challenge to its constitutionality. I will come back to that issue and delve into the circumstances that have led to a danger of that happening.

This is a measure that has been considered in the House three times during three previous Parliament when bills were brought forward that provided for exactly the very limited measures that are provided for in this bill. They died on the order paper, despite two days of debate in the House in the last Parliament and five days of debate in committee in the last Parliament. These issues have been thoroughly ventilated among all of us.

They have received the benefit of the views of the members opposite in committee and in the House, and our consultations to date lead us to believe that, on this narrow but important issue of the independence of military judges, there is a consensus among the parties represented in the House to move forward with alacrity and to ensure that trial by court martial in this country's military justice institutions continues to take place in full conformity with the law and the continuing modernization of our civilian, civil and military justice practices.

Ensuring the safety of Canadians requires that members of the Canadian Forces remain in a constant state of operational readiness. In this regard, the military justice system is a critical tool in allowing the chain of command to deal with matters directly related to the discipline, efficiency and morale of the military. Many hon. members on all sides of the House will know first-hand from their experience, and we all know from our observation of the excellence of our Canadian armed forces the importance of morale, the fundamental importance of justice that is swift, justice that is fair, justice that brings together a team that reinforces the cohesion of that team to the smooth operational functioning of a military.

Government Orders

It is not just a question of the institution's effectiveness, it is also a question of our military's ability to reflect the values that we as Canadians hold dear. Any Canadian soldier, private, sergeant or officers, whether they are in Libya or on a peacekeeping mission on the Golan Heights or anywhere else, will tell us that they can only do their job to the extent that they are representing and projecting Canada's values. Those values are built upon a system of law, a system of justice and that system must be fully reflected in the system of military justice that serves our military.

• (1010)

[Translation]

In the absence of such a system, our military men and women would not be able to focus on their top priority—protecting the interests of Canada and its people.

[English]

For that reason, the government, the Supreme Court of Canada and even the Constitution have recognized the importance of maintaining a robust military justice system. The military justice system must meet the unique needs of the Canadian Forces and must also be subject to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The charter guarantees that a person who is charged with an offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty in accordance with the law in a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal.

It is on the issue of independence that I speak to the House today. The independence of the judiciary is a fundamental right of all Canadians, and maintaining that independence is an important responsibility of government. This means ensuring that Canadian courts, including courts martial, are free from real and perceived undue influences and interference.

[Translation]

Judicial independence, or the freedom to deliver a ruling based solely on fact and law, requires that the judge presiding over a trial have a certain level of job security and that his appointment be permanent.

[English]

That is the system we have in our civil courts and it is the system we must now have in our military justice system.

On June 2 of this year, the Court Martial Appeal Court made an important decision regarding the security of tenure of military judges. I am referring to the case of *Regina v. Leblanc*. This ruling assessed that the process by which military judges are appointed, currently on a five year renewable basis, does not satisfy the constitutional requirement for an independent judiciary. Therefore, the court has given Parliament six months, or until December 2, to pass remedial legislation to update the National Defence Act, otherwise, its provisions related to the appointment and tenure of military judges will be declared constitutionally invalid. This is not a new issue.

[Translation]

Since it took office, the government has been actively seeking to make amendments, similar to those I just mentioned, to the National Defence Act.

[English]

The enhancement of judicial independence is one issue that the government first attempted to address in 2006 with Bill C-7, which died on the order paper, as I mentioned at the outset. Since then, the government has attempted to amend the National Defence Act on two separate occasions: Bill C-45 in 2008 and Bill C-41 in 2010, both of which died on the order paper as a result of prorogation or the dissolution of Parliament.

Therefore, we cannot be taken to task for not having tried to resolve this issue earlier as circumstances literally did not permit us to bring these efforts, which we all have endorsed in one way or another, to fruition. Ideally, Parliament would have passed legislation that would have dealt with the issue of security of tenure in 2006, unfortunately, circumstances were such that this was not the case. Today, with a renewed sense of urgency on this issue, we come before this House with Bill C-16.

In order to address the concerns identified in the *Leblanc* decision, the proposed amendments to the National Defence Act contained in Bill C-16 would provide military judges with security of tenure to the fixed age of 60, subject only to removal for cause based on the recommendations of an inquiry committee established under regulations. This is a procedure that reflects, in the military justice system, the type of removal proceedings that we see in our civilian justice system in extreme cases when it is applied to judges.

The government recognizes that 60 is an earlier age for retirement than most judges in the civilian justice system. However, we must remember that military judges are commissioned officers in the Canadian Forces, colonels and lieutenant colonels at the moment, and that the military must balance the need for an experienced judiciary with the need for physical fitness and deployability in all of its members. It is the principle of universality of service. For this reason, 60 is the maximum prescribed retirement age for all Canadian Forces members, and this must include military judges who are, of course, members of the Canadian Forces.

• (1015)

[Translation]

I would like to close by emphasizing that the government recognizes that the amendments proposed in this bill are technical in nature, but they constitute amendments that are necessary to ensure that the National Defence Act is consistent with the charter and that the military justice system operates in accordance with Canadian legal standards.

[English]

We are really talking about the modernization of our military justice system, the obligation we have to ensure that our system reflects developments in the civil justice system. I am not only speaking about our own observation as parliamentarians, as government, that this must take place, but observations that have been endorsed by the Supreme Court of Canada and by a recent decision by the military appeals court that this now take place specifically with regard to the issue of the independence of military judges.

Should Bill C-16 not move forward quickly the ability of military judges to hear cases will be put into question, causing uncertainty within the military justice system. By ensuring security of tenure to the fixed age of 60, Bill C-16 would make a significant contribution toward ensuring the continued independence of military judges within the military justice system.

Let us keep in mind that our military justice system has a long-standing and proud tradition in Canada. The Court Martial Appeal Court was created in 1959 by Parliament. It is a military justice system that is subject to civilian control, civilian supervision and civilian oversight. It is also subject to that oversight in that the Court Martial Appeal Court is a superior court of record with a chief justice of its own. It is composed only of superior court judges appointed by governor in council. Appeals from this court go directly to the Supreme Court of Canada, so our military justice system fits under the charter, under our Constitution, into a system of justice that is overseen ultimately under appeal by the Supreme Court of Canada.

Let us also put the bill into perspective. The full-time military judges of whom we speak and to which this new measure would apply number four in this country at the moment, three of whom are lieutenant colonels and one a colonel. They do handle a large amount of work. The bill really would apply to a relatively restricted field of the military justice system and our military as a whole.

This government recognizes that while urgent, the issue of judicial independence is but one of many aspects of our military justice system that requires updating. Performing a regular review of any legal system is necessary to ensure its continued relevance and effectiveness, which is why the government has also introduced Bill C-15, which proposes implementing many of the recommendations found in the 2003 report by the late chief justice Antonio Lamer.

Together, Bill C-15 and Bill C-16 represent a comprehensive response to the recommendations found in the Lamer report and in *Regina v. Leblanc* to ensure that our military justice system remains consistent with Canadian values.

I therefore call upon the House to support both of these important bills as they move forward. I also call upon those independent members of the House, some of whom were active in committee in reviewing the provisions now contained both in Bill C-15 and Bill C-16, to join us in moving the bills forward expeditiously in recognizing that the values we all share, the military we all support, deserves to see these technical but important updated measures move forward as quickly as possible.

It is one of our duties to our military. It is our duty to Canadians to move quickly forward on this. We need to ensure that our Canadian Forces are served by the best, the most modern, the most effective military justice system that we can have in this country at this time.

• (1020)

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will make my own speech in a few minutes, but I would just like to refer to the member's notion of the duty of the independent members of the House. I would like to ask the parliamentary secretary, why are we in this situation that he has to call upon them to do that? They just refused unanimous consent to a motion to move this through quickly, but they did so in an apparent retaliation for what the government refused yesterday.

Government Orders

I see the member is wearing a poppy. We made statements the other day on the occasion of Remembrance Day. It is traditional in the House. The Green Party has a representative here, even though it does not have party status. The Bloc Québécois has four members but no party status. These members wanted to have an opportunity to make a Remembrance Day statement, yet the government refused.

The House leader for the New Democrats, the official opposition, specifically asked for unanimous consent yesterday and it was refused by the parliamentary secretary and his party. That is why we are in a situation where there is not a free flow to see this go through. I think there is a general will that this be passed.

The government is the author of its own misfortune. Why would it refuse to allow the representatives of the Green Party and the Bloc to make a statement in observance of Remembrance Day?

Mr. Chris Alexander: Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that any member of the House would see fit, for any reason, to politicize an issue, to link an issue that really is, and I think the member for St. John's East would agree with me, technical in nature, that is urgent because of the judicial context now set for this issue.

Yes, there is give and take in the House. There is free flow of requests and agreements, sometimes request refusals. However, let us be clear, if this measure does not move forward expeditiously, and we had hoped it would do so today, and we still think expeditious progress for the bill is possible, those who will suffer are all of us in the House because our credibility in serving the military and the military justice system will be in doubt.

Every single member of the Canadian armed forces who is served by the court martial system, by the summary trial system, runs the risk of having the constitutionality of that system being called into question as early as December 2. Therefore, the urgency does transcend the give and take that we habitually engage in in the House. It should compel all members to reconsider their positions and to move toward expeditious passage of the bill.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I was not going to touch on this issue, but the hon. member for St. John's East has raised it. It grieves me enormously to block unanimous consent on this matter. The parliamentary secretary's presentation on the facts and the value of Bill C-16 is uncontested from the Green Party's point of view. He presented it admirably.

However, it has been a source of great grief. I have heard from Green Party members across the country. They are stunned that independent members were not allowed to speak. Others have spoken from other parties to reflect on the sacrifices of those in previous wars and those currently in military action.

Government Orders

Patriotism is not something that is the exclusive province of one party on one side of the House. If anyone has politicized any issue inappropriately it was government members who two days in a row have refused the Bloc Québécois members in Parliament and the duly elected Green Party member of Parliament in speaking to Remembrance Day.

I think the matter of unanimous consent is usually negotiated. It is negotiated with goodwill and that goodwill was absent in this case.

Mr. Chris Alexander: Mr. Speaker, I would simply urge our hon. colleagues opposite, the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands, and those other independent members who made their views known at the start of today's debate, to find a different way of expressing their displeasure.

The decision rendered on June 2 by the Court Martial Appeal Court was one that declared our current military justice system invalid because of the lack of security of tenure for judges. The provisions of this ruling were suspended until December 2 to allow this House to act, to allow the Parliament to Canada to correct this situation. December 2 is coming quickly.

Those members have a position that they wanted to express. They are entitled to use the rules of this place for whatever ends they choose. However, I would appeal to them to choose a different context, to make a different piece of legislation, a different measure, the object of their disapproval or their disruption in this case. Military justice and the integrity of the justice system serving the Canada armed forces is too important.

• (1025)

[*Translation*]

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I greatly appreciated the hon. member's speech. It was very detailed and interesting. He has represented Canada's foreign affairs department in Afghanistan and he supports human rights everywhere in the world. I have a question for him: why is it important for members of the military and all Canadians to have an independent judiciary? He spoke about the Constitution in his speech and I would like him to speak a little bit more about the importance of an independent judiciary here.

Mr. Chris Alexander: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question. It is truly important for all members of this House to have a good understanding of what members of our Canadian Armed Forces experience. They are often deployed overseas, in such places as Afghanistan, where the justice system does not work well or even not at all. That was certainly the case in Kandahar in 2006 and it continues to be the case for several areas of justice in Afghanistan.

Therefore, it is vital that our armed forces take with them a reliable justice system that is consistent with our values. When they are deployed, they are governed by the military rather than the civilian justice system. Military justice in Afghanistan, Libya and other countries where our forces are deployed must be swift and fair and reflect the values of Canada's civilian justice system and its most recent developments.

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as my colleagues said earlier, it is rather difficult to listen to our hon. Conservative colleague tell us that we are politicizing an issue, when all the Conservatives have been doing from the beginning is

ramming their bills down our throats. I would like to read a quote and ask him to comment. Manon Cornellier, who is a very respected columnist in Quebec, had this to say:

The Conservatives have a majority. They know that they will get their bills through and that they have the time to honour the best parliamentary traditions, that is, by acting in a thoughtful and insightful way and giving members, organizations and the public an opportunity to be heard. Ideally, this should be accompanied by a willingness to listen.

The government wants its bills, for example bills C-10 and C-19, to be passed post-haste. It is telling us that we are politicizing the debate, but in fact it is the one doing so. That is rather rich.

Mr. Chris Alexander: Mr. Speaker, I have not read Ms. Cornellier's article. However, I can assure the hon. member for Gatineau that, in this case, we listened to her party and had some real in-depth discussions on this issue in the House during previous Parliaments and in committee. We agree. We agree on the independence of military judges.

I think, then, that our idea to introduce this bill efficiently and quickly reflects the best traditions of the House in terms of consultation and willingness to reach a consensus, two very common things in the history of this House. I can assure my colleague that in issues related to military justice, we intend to continue this tradition —

• (1030)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I regret to interrupt the hon. member.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for St. John's East.

[*English*]

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to speak to this legislation because it provides an opportunity to talk about how important the Charter of Rights and Freedoms is in our country. It is the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms that gives the reason for this piece of legislation to correct something which, in the current context, is contrary to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

This is something that was introduced into our law in 1983 and the effects of it, as we are seeing today, are still reverberating. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms is for all Canadian citizens, regardless of who they are, whether the person is a soldier, as in this case, or a criminal with a record as long as his arm, as they say in the vernacular, or an ordinary Canadian who happens to find himself or herself in front of the courts.

The charter has many provisions. This one is about section 11(d). Section 11(d) of the charter provides that any person who is charged with an offence has the right "to be presumed innocent until proven guilty according to law in a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal". Each and every word of that provision is important. Each and every word of that provision of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms has been tested and given judicial interpretation over the last 28 years since the charter came into effect. It is an important fundamental underpinning of our system of justice.

Government Orders

How did this case come about and why are we here? We are talking about whether judges in the military courts should have security of tenure. This is not for the judges. Some people say that judges want to have longer tenure, they want to have longer careers and do not want to be subject to being removed, laid off or not reappointed. It is not about that at all. According to the existing legislation, the military judges are appointed for a term of five years. They hear courts martial. Of course, under military justice life imprisonment could be given as a sentence, so under military tribunals, courts martial, these judges have a tremendous amount of authority and power under the law. The military justice system is a parallel one and in many ways is very different.

We will be getting into an argument about what that means in regard to a lot of other provisions in military justice under Bill C-15 when we get to that. This one has been taken out, and probably for good reason, because it is less controversial. We think this legislation should be passed swiftly.

It was part of Bill C-41 in the last Parliament, which we thought was going to pass. It went through committee and got right to the end. We even reached a compromise on a number of things and made some good amendments, but lo and behold, instead of bringing it into the House for third reading and passage, the government forgot about it, laid it aside, or for some reason did not bring it through. This was after the Court Martial Appeal Court of Canada had made this ruling on June 2. Everybody knew this was coming because this was the court of appeal, not the regular court martial where a similar decision had also been made.

The government was well aware of this then, and I think it has been wise to take it out separately and see if it could get co-operation to have it passed. We are prepared to co-operate. We are a very reasonable opposition. When we see something that needs to be done, it can be expedited. We even provided unanimous consent. Our part of unanimous consent was provided this morning to have this bill brought into law at least in the House of Commons today and be sent to the other place for speedy passage. We offered that consent because we are very reasonable and co-operative when it is appropriate to be.

Let me tell members what this case was about.

• (1035)

Mr. LeBlanc and other soldiers were tasked with guarding a CF-18 at a Canadian air force base. The aircraft was on standby for the Francophonie summit being held in Quebec City in October 2008. Corporal LeBlanc and his companion were one of two teams guarding the aircraft. He and his companion were on lookout, sitting in a truck parked by the hangar. His companion went off to use the washroom, and left Corporal LeBlanc sitting in the truck by himself. Lo and behold, when his pal left the truck to go to the washroom, he was inside the hangar and was away for about five minutes, a sergeant drove up next to Corporal LeBlanc's side of the truck. The trial judge found that Corporal LeBlanc had been reclining and had his eyes closed for at least 10 seconds. His eyes were closed for 10 seconds and as a result he was charged with negligence and not being vigilant in his duty under section 124 of the National Defence Act, negligently performing a military duty imposed on him.

That is what gave rise to this. He was brought before a court martial and he was convicted because the trial judge ruled that even though they did not have proper security of tenure, the trial judge thought they did and made his ruling anyway. It went to the court of appeal in the military tribunal. It said the issue was raised as to whether or not military judges were impartial. Military judges are very well trained. They are lawyers. They usually come from the judge advocate general's office. They are steeped in the rules of law and they are appointed as a judge, but they are appointed for five years. That five years may or may not be renewed.

If a judge is trying to decide a case, it is not about the judge, it is about the accused. Does the accused have an understanding that there is a standard of judicial independence so that the judge is not impartial as between him and the military? The judge, in the minds of the accused and everyone else, is dependent upon the military brass for his reappointment. The judges of the court martial appeal court are very well qualified. For example, Justice Létourneau, is one of the authors, along with retired Colonel Michel Drapeau, of perhaps the only significant text on military law in Canada. A new edition came out a week or two ago. He sat on that court. The court said that five-year renewable terms for military judges did not provide the necessary constitutional protection, especially considering the fact that it was considered necessary to give such protection to civilian judges exercising the same functions.

That is a simple explanation of how this case got to where it is. This legislation is designed to fix that. It was in Bill C-41 which passed second reading, went through committee and was reported back to the House but did not get passed. We agreed with that provision. In fact, it was this provision that was used as an excuse to fast-track the legislation. The government said that it was very important and it must get done not a month ago, but a year ago, even before the case on June 2, but it did not get passed.

We are here, reasonable as we are, and we are prepared to do it anyway because we know it needs to be done. It is important that this piece of legislation be passed in the context of understanding the importance of our Charter of Rights and Freedoms for all Canadians, including those in the military.

• (1040)

There will be more debate about that because there are many provisions in the National Defence Act and the military justice system that do not give the same protections to soldiers in the military justice system as civilians would have in civilian court. We will, of course, have further debate about that, but with respect to this provision, we agree.

This is not new. As I said, this has been debated many times. In my province of Newfoundland and Labrador, for example, there was a provision for provincial court judges. They are the ones who hear 95% of 96% of the cases. It turns out that back in the late 1980s, early 1990s, the Newfoundland minister of justice could transfer a provincial court judge. The minister could simply say that the judge would now be transferred to Maine, for example, or anywhere else. Maybe the judge lives in Maine, is transferred to St. John's, but does not want to live there.

Government Orders

The minister of justice, the attorney general, had the power to transfer judges to Comerbrook or wherever. The mere fact that could be done was not considered to be impartial as between Her Majesty The Queen and the accused. Her Majesty The Queen's representative, the minister of justice or attorney general, could actually move judges if the minister, for whatever reason, did not like their judgments or was not satisfied they were doing the job the justice minister wanted them to do in that jurisdiction.

That power was deemed unconstitutional and it had to be changed for impartiality. It is a mundane example, but it is a reality of the importance of the Charter of Rights. At the end of the day, that provides for our protection.

This has a long and very interesting history, but it comes up again and again. It has come up here today. It came up yesterday with respect to Mr. Khadr who is in the United States. He is called a self-confessed terrorist. He is a Canadian citizen and his rights and freedoms are important, too. Yet the government took the position before the Supreme Court of Canada that we should not recognize those rights because our neighbour wanted to try him. It was the government's actions that infringed upon his rights and the Supreme Court of Canada refused to hear the case.

These are rights for all citizens. They are not designed to protect criminals. They are designed to ensure, as the charter has, that an accused person before a court, whether it be a military court, a civilian court or any other, has the right to be tried in a fair and public way according to law. The individual is presumed innocent and tried in a public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal. Each and every one of these words is extremely important and part of the fundamental underpinnings of our judicial system, the freedoms we enjoy, the freedoms we talk about when we say that we support our veterans because they have fought for our ability to build a society that has these freedoms.

Canada has a society that has developed over the many years, through trial and error in some cases, not always making progress. It seems as if we are going to take some backward steps in the next few months with Bill C-10. We will go backward and there will be another government to go forward again. It is not always the steady march of progress, as I am sure members are aware. It depends in which direction we want to go, but in this case the Charter of Rights and Freedoms has brought a great measure of protection to our citizens and a standard by which the justice system is measured.

• (1045)

As to Corporal Leblanc, he was dealt with because the appeal was allowed in part. However, the part which found him guilty of neglect of duty was upheld, but only on a technicality. In that case the court martial judge thought there was security of tenure until retirement or maybe that he was ready to retire and it did not matter to him. However, the principle was a factor in the case and was enough of a factor to get it to the Court Martial Appeal Court of Canada. That is a separate court of appeal. From that court of appeal, a case can go directly to the Supreme Court of Canada, so it is a very high court.

We really did not need this case to prove it because representatives of the legal system, the military justice system and the Department of National Defence and anyone who was interested in the matter, as

well as Michel Drapeau who appeared before our committee the last time, talked about this as a fundamental problem.

There are other issues we can talk about in terms of military justice. Is it necessary for those judges be officers? That is an interesting point. It has been argued before the defence committee that we should have a mix of civilian and military judges in the military justice system. It is important to understand how the military works, but it is also important to not get caught up in the culture of the military to the exclusion of the importance of having a standard justice that applies equally to citizens whether they are in the military or not. We can debate that at length.

However, in the context of this situation, we believe it is important that the military justice system not be hamstrung by a system which everyone clearly recognizes fails to meet the standard of appropriate impartiality and does not meet the constitutional test.

I have had some thoughts about the requirement of retirement at age 60. If we consider the notion that it is a military justice system, then from the day one joins the military, he or she knows there is a mandatory retirement at age 60. That is part of the system. It has nothing to do with whether one is a judge or a master corporal working on base or a general. The fact that one is appointed as a military judge, he or she still has to retire at age 60 as opposed to a Supreme Court judge who retires at age 75 or at age 70, depending on which jurisdiction. Those judges have been considered to have judicial independence. In the military, 60 is young for a judge. However, in the military context it is not considered to be a mandatory form of retirement.

There are some issues about supernumeraries, but that is a detail we do not need to get into now. If there is a mandatory retirement age of 60, at least in the context of the report on the court case itself, and I do not have the whole transcript in front of me and I do not know everything that was argued, there does not appear to be a lot of other discussion about other aspects of it. The focus was on the five-year renewable term being the issue, which is what we are dealing with now. Any possible nuances on that could perhaps be argued at another time and in another case. In this case, the provision of the five-year renewable term is clearly the one that needs to be changed.

We support that change. We support fast-tracking it. We support passing it today and sending it to the other place for consideration. However, without unanimous consent, we will have a second reading debate. It will then have to go to committee. The defence committee will have to look at it. Then it would be sent back for report stage in the House. There will be a potential debate at report stage, then at third reading. It would then go to the Senate to have it dealt with and then be passed into law. It may take some time, perhaps beyond December 2. I do not know what pace the other members in the House will take in dealing with this. We are satisfied to have it passed today and to go on to the other place. It is important that we deal with constitutional matters that are clearly agreed upon.

• (1050)

As the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands has said, she has no problem with the legislation, but it is a question of having other issues intertwined, which unfortunately the government has seen fit to do despite the fact that it is normal courtesy in the House to recognize an important national event like Remembrance Day. Courtesy should be extended to members to be allowed to say a few words.

Those are my remarks at second reading and I would be happy to respond to any questions or comments.

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, I have to direct a comment to the independent member who blocked unanimous consent this morning. I note he did not remain in the House and that speaks to the ethics, integrity and values—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. I remind all hon. members that it is not the practice of the House to make direct reference to who is or is not in the chamber. With that, I will go back to the hon. member for Etobicoke Centre, if he has a question.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Mr. Speaker, I apologize, I did not realize that was a rule. However, no politician in the House should walk upon the backs of Canadian Forces members, because we already stand upon their shoulders, especially on a minor political irritant or argument that would hold up something that is so fundamental to the fairness of all Canadian Forces soldiers.

I have a question for the hon. member for St. John's East, who I have had the pleasure of serving with on the defence committee. He is an accomplished and intelligent individual.

The backgrounder to the legislation states that:

The military justice system is designed to promote the operational effectiveness of the Canadian Forces by contributing to the maintenance of discipline, efficiency and morale.

Former Justice Lamer of the Supreme Court states:

To maintain the Armed Forces in a state of readiness, the military must be in a position to enforce internal discipline effectively and efficiently. Breaches of military discipline must be dealt with speedily and, frequently, punished more severely than would be the case if a civilian engaged in such conduct. As a result, the military has its own Code of Service Discipline to allow it to meet its particular disciplinary needs. In addition, special service tribunals, rather than the ordinary courts—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. The Chair has tried to signal to the member that his time to question is over. If he could quickly come to his question, that would be appreciated.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Mr. Speaker, does the hon. member and his party agree that there is a need and a place for a separate military justice system?

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, first, I thank the member for Etobicoke Centre for his kind remarks and compliment of my work on the defence committee.

The statement the member read from the report of the late Mr. Justice Antonio Lamer is an important one. It is a fundamental tenet of military justice overview. There are a number of other matters as well that become evident if one reads more closely to what Justice Lamer said. There are differences between military justice and civilian justice and part of it has to do with the operational aspect.

Government Orders

For example, in a combat zone, we do not have the same leisure to deal with matters, particularly if they involve discipline. I think it is widely recognized around the world that military justice is different and the need for a prompt response to matters than can affect morale and operational security is extremely important.

I agree with the general principle that there needs to be a separate military justice system, but it also must be closely examined to ensure that we do not go beyond what is necessary for the sake of having an efficient military. Indeed, it has been enunciated here that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms must be considered applicable to the situation. Although, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms itself says that it can be modified if it is proven to be necessary for operational reasons. Section 1 of the charter is an exception system.

• (1055)

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I never cease to be amazed at the talent of this institution to turn what should be short and sweet into long and painful.

I listened to the hon. member's speech and I listened to the speech of the hon. member before him. There is not a word with which any of us disagree, yet we have now used virtually an hour's worth of time to talk about something on which we all agree.

My comment and question is that I have neither comment nor question. I urge hon. members to do the same.

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, I would tend to agree with him. In fact, I believe we offered unanimous consent, along with the hon. member, so this could be put into law immediately, but since unanimous consent was refused, I thought it important on the eve of Remembrance Day week that we talk about that important principle for which our veterans fight, and fought, and for which some laid down their lives, and that is the freedoms we enjoy.

This is about those fundamental freedoms—not only the fundamental freedoms of all Canadians, but in this case the fundamental rights and freedoms as they apply to our soldiers themselves.

I beg the indulgence of my former colleague on the defence committee to allow us to have this discussion and to talk about how important it is that we recognize that this is one of the freedoms contained in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms that people are fighting for. As I was going to point out to my previous colleague, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees the rights and freedoms that it sets out, subject only to such reasonable limits prescribed by law as can demonstrably be justified in a free and democratic society. That is what we are trying to achieve in this country.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for St. John's East for his comments and I certainly agree with all the compliments going his way in terms of the work he does. We are very proud of the member.

I want to clarify again with the member two things. Number one, ordinarily the public has the right to expect that the official opposition will hold the government's feet to the fire in terms of being accountable, yet here we see the opposition just lying down and letting things happen.

Statements by Members

Second, the government members are forever saying that the official opposition, the NDP, does not support the military and does not support our troops. They say that all the time. We hear a couple of them howling now.

Would the hon. member take an opportunity to concisely explain why the official opposition is doing what it is doing today, and how the official opposition feels about our citizens in uniform?

Mr. Jack Harris: Looking at the clock, Mr. Speaker, I do not think it gives me enough time to deal with the important questions raised by my colleague, the new defence critic, who so far, and it has only been a week or so, is doing a great job in his new role.

As the official opposition, NDP members have two roles. One is to hold the government to account, but we are also Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, so it is about our taking a responsible position when we have legislation like this, legislation that is concise and to the point about ensuring that our soldiers have the same fundamental rights as everybody else.

We are ready to co-operate. We are ready to give voice to that. We are ready to see this put into law as quickly as possible.

The people opposite like to propagandize every chance they get by, uttering rhetorical flourishes such as "The NDP hates the military" or "The NDP does not support our troops". All of the things they say all the time are hogwash, as I think even the hon. members who say it know, but we sometimes need to remind Canadians of that; there are more of them than there are of us for the time being, so we need to speak louder.

● (1100)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The time for questions and comments has expired, just in time for statements by members.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[Translation]

VETERANS

Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in memory of my father and my uncles, Raymond, Laurent and Rodolphe, who all served this country,

[English]

in honour of the volunteers of the Royal Canadian Legion, Don Johns, Bud Dion, Jeannine and Raymond St-Louis, Frank Stacey, and all the volunteers who offer poppies this week, this is *In Flanders Fields*, by John McCrae:

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below...

[Translation]

We are the Dead.
Short days ago

We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved, and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders Fields.

[English]

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands, we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields...

REMEMBRANCE

Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, tonight I will be celebrating Russian Unity Day with the Canadian-speaking Russian community and thanking them for their dedication to Canada.

In celebrating our cultural diversity, we are all reminded of the countless blessings we enjoy in this country, and this is a time to remember those who are protecting our freedoms.

With Remembrance Day on the horizon and Veterans' Week starting tomorrow, Canadians are remembering our past and honouring those who have served and are currently serving in uniform.

We also cannot forget the sacrifices made or the lives lost in war, which is why I stand in support of our government to create a National Holocaust Memorial. As the Minister of State (Democratic Reform) recently said:

The National Holocaust Monument will serve as a symbol of Canadian value and diversity as much as it will be a memorial for the millions of victims and families destroyed.

As the first child of a Holocaust survivor to be elected as a member of this Parliament, this monument is very meaningful to me personally and to my family. Furthermore, from November 1 to November 11, the annual Holocaust Education Week is an effort to educate all Canadians about the Holocaust.

I call on all members of this House to support these important events and initiatives.

MONSIGNOR PERCY JOHNSON CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to celebrate Monsignor Percy Johnson Catholic High School in Etobicoke North, its principal Susan Souter, teachers Joe Paczuski and Marcella Porretta, and their students.

Ms. Porretta is described as an exemplary leader and an inspiration to the students, tireless in her dedication to fostering community and compassion among youth, and a saint of education and community.

Ms. Porretta formed a Me to We chapter of 130 students who give up weekends to volunteer in the community and who have fundraised over \$20,000 for schools in Sierra Leone and Ecuador.

I had the honour of attending their community harvest brunch, and was humbled, overwhelmed and forever touched by the generosity and kindness of the Me to We club and their teachers.

I celebrate them all and look forward to attending their next event.

* * *

NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there was disunity in the NDP ranks again yesterday as the NDP leadership hopeful and member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou distanced himself from the NDP's stance towards a hypothetical sovereign Quebec.

While the NDP is contradicting itself on hypothetical constitutional matters, our Conservative government remains focused on the top priority of Quebecers and all Canadians, jobs and economic growth. This is yet another worrying example of the NDP and its priorities and policies.

Now that the NDP has set a precedent by punishing two of their MPs who refused to follow the orders of their leader on the Conservative government's bid to end the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry, will the MP for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou suffer the same fate? There seems to be a real democratic deficit over there. They are not allowing MPs to vote their conscience.

* * *

• (1105)

[Translation]

CITY OF RIMOUSKI

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a recent study by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business—the CFIB—entitled “Communities in Boom” ranks Rimouski in 11th place among Canadian cities and second in Quebec when it comes to entrepreneurial vision.

There is no denying that small and medium-sized businesses are what drive the economic development of the Lower St. Lawrence and, as the vice-president and chief economist of the CFIB said, “... independent businesses and start-ups are vital sources of energy on which communities grow and flourish”.

In a press release, the mayor of Rimouski, Éric Forest, highlighted the hard work of Chantal Pilon and the Société de promotion économique de Rimouski. She and her team work with entrepreneurs every day to promote the economic and social well-being of their community.

Positive results can be achieved when we work hard and work together. That is why I would like to increase our efforts to promote unity among the socio-economic players in my riding, so that the other communities in my region can experience the same optimism, confidence and success. Keep up the good work.

* * *

ASBESTOS

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on Wednesday, a number

Statements by Members

of Conservative MPs took the moral high ground and chose not to vote against the NDP motion and I commend them for that today. The hon. members for Sarnia—Lambton, Ottawa—Orléans, Lethbridge, Edmonton—Leduc and London West chose not to spread disease among thousands of workers, not to prevent the creation of an assistance plan for the asbestos regions and not to tarnish the reputation of the House or of Canada.

The same cannot be said about the vast majority of Conservative caucus members, who turned a deaf ear to the colleges of physicians, which insisted that protecting health must come before political interests.

It is time for this government to face the facts and change its position on asbestos.

* * *

[English]

REMEMBRANCE DAY

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the next number of days Canadians will pause to remember. Lest we forget.

I rise today to honour Canada's veterans and salute those who help us remember.

Cambridge artist Dave Sopha wanted our soldiers' sacrifice in Afghanistan to be remembered. After two and a half years and 6,500 hours of work, the portraits of honour was completed in May of this year. One hundred and fifty-seven of our soldiers will each be remembered larger than life in intimate detail on a 40-foot by 10-foot mural.

Thanks to the support of Kin Canada, hundreds of thousands of Canadians have taken the time to view and to remember. We will remember them as individual heroes with families, thanks to Dave Sopha's creation.

I ask all Canadians to join me in celebrating Dave Sopha and the tens of thousands of veterans, volunteers and sponsors who organize remembrance events in communities across Canada.

Lest we forget.

* * *

INNOVATIVE WOOD CONSTRUCTION AWARDS

Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last night was a very special night for northwestern Ontario at the Ontario Wood WORKS! gala for innovative wood construction.

Statements by Members

FedNor sponsored Wood WORKS! recognizes excellence in the cutting-edge use of wood products in commercial and community projects designed and made in Ontario. Plenty of great projects were recognized all across Ontario, and I congratulate them all, but in the end it was the great Kenora riding's time to shine, taking home not one, not two, but three awards: the Institutional Wood Design Award under \$10 million for the Lake of the Woods Discovery Centre, the Northern Ontario Excellence Award for the Sioux Lookout Meno Ya Win Health Centre, and the best overall architect award to Nelson Architecture of Kenora.

Forestry is a critical part of northwestern Ontario's past, present and future. We are just plain good with wood.

I want to thank the Wood WORKS! program for helping to raise the profile of our wood design and production excellence. Northwestern Ontario wood works, and our achievements last night are further examples of what is so great about the great Kenora riding.

PRIME MINISTER'S AWARD FOR TEACHING EXCELLENCE

Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very honoured to stand again to say how proud I am that two teachers in my riding of Scarborough Southwest are recipients of this year's prestigious Prime Minister's Award for Teaching Excellence.

The second teacher I would like to recognize is Al Baigent, a teacher at Neil McNeil Catholic Secondary School.

The award-winning leadership program that Mr. Baigent has developed is an asset to his students, their families and our community as a whole. Students in his program are developing critical leadership skills that prepare them for the future.

In addition to his incredible work in the classroom, Mr. Baigent is also very involved in extracurricular sports activities, organizing local cross-country running events as well as helping to coordinate province-wide track meets. Mr. Baigent also leads many school trips locally and abroad and shares his expertise with new and interested teachers. Our community is truly privileged to have such a passionate, creative and dedicated teacher working in our schools.

I want to extend my sincere congratulations to Mr. Baigent on receiving this year's Prime Minister's Award for Teaching Excellence and thank him for the commitment he demonstrates on a daily basis to the students at Neil McNeil.

● (1110)

POLISH INDEPENDENCE DAY

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Polish Independence Day will be celebrated on November 11 by Poles around the world.

Ninety-three years have passed since Poland regained its independence as a free and democratic state. All Polish people are rightly proud of this achievement and have guarded that hard-fought independence throughout the 20th century.

Two years after its re-establishment in 1920, the fledgling Polish state faced its greatest challenge when the Soviet Red Army invaded Poland. Against all odds, the Polish military repelled the Red Army, thereby saving western Europe from a Communist fate. This resolute commitment to freedom has always defined the Polish spirit.

This year's commemoration marks the end of another era in the history of Poland's fight for the cause of freedom with the passing of Brigadier-General Tadeusz Sawicz, who had lived in Canada since 1957 and was the last known Polish veteran of the Battle of Britain.

A week from now, when we commemorate Remembrance Day and Poland celebrates its Independence Day, let us remember the invaluable contributions of those soldiers who fought for their freedom and ours.

[Translation]

ABITIBI-TÉMISCAMINGUE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi-Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the 30th international film festival in Abitibi-Témiscamingue closed yesterday evening. This festival proves that culture is alive and well in the remote regions. Every year, this festival showcases outstanding animated, short and feature films and everything in between.

I would like to point out that two hon. members from this House contributed to these films. We can hear the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay singing and providing commentary in the documentary by Richard Desjardins and Robert Monderie called *Trou Story* or *The Hole Story* which paints a picture of the mining industry in Canada. The hon. member for Manicouagan plays a role in the fictional feature film *Mesnak*, the first such film directed by a member of the first nations, namely Yves Sioui Durand, who does a fine job paying tribute to first nations peoples. This year, the Grand Prix Hydro-Québec went to director Philippe Falardeau for his film *Monsieur Lazhar*.

In closing, I would like to congratulate the three co-founders of the festival, Mr. Matte, Mr. Dallaire and Mr. Parent, on receiving the Quebec National Assembly medal. Congratulations, gentlemen, on your accomplishments.

[English]

IMMIGRATION

Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday our Conservative government announced that it is planning to welcome more federal skilled workers in 2012. In fact, it plans to welcome over 55,000 federal skilled workers in 2012, up from 47,000 last year.

I am also proud to inform the House that, after the previous Liberal government left us with a massive backlog of applications and very long wait times, our government took actions that are showing great results.

*Oral Questions***HELICOPTER CRASH**

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Wednesday's helicopter crash south of Kapuskasing, near Clear Lake, which took the lives of three northern Ontario residents will echo through the communities along the Highway 11 corridor and North Bay for a long time.

[Translation]

What should have been just another day at work for the pilot, Greg Sawyer, of North Bay, and his two passengers, Tembec employees Dan Simis, of Val Rita, and Chad McQuade, of Kapuskasing, ended in the worst way possible: they were killed in the prime of their lives. A tragedy like this affects the victims' families, friends, colleagues and employers, and hits these tightly woven communities in northern Ontario hard.

This reminds us just how precious life is and that nothing should be taken for granted. I ask the members of this House to join me, my provincial counterpart, Gilles Bison, the mayor of Kapuskasing and the people of Tembec in offering our deepest sympathies and sincere condolences to the families, friends and colleagues of these men.

* * *

[English]

VETERANS

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Nellie McClung once said, "People must know the past to understand the present and to face the future".

As we approach Veterans' Week, I would like to take a moment to reflect on the important role of women in Canada's proud military tradition.

As members of the armed forces, whether serving in air, on land or on sea or as civilians providing support roles, the contribution of women to Canada's military history has been as diverse as the women themselves.

[Translation]

They kept the home fires burning, nursed injured soldiers and served in conflicts around the world. They have fought and died to defend and protect Canadian values. No matter what challenges and dangers they faced, Canadian women answered the call.

[English]

We will remember them.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

EMPLOYMENT

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, New Democrats have been pointing out daily that the Conservatives have no jobs plan. With the devastating job loss numbers announced today, maybe now the government will finally listen. Unemployment is once again on the rise. Canada lost 72,000 jobs in October alone, most of them from the high value-added manufacturing sector.

Despite opposition from both the NDP and the Liberals, our government has cut the backlog left by the Liberals in half, which is two years earlier than expected. Now skilled workers are waiting only months, not years, to have their files processed.

Our Conservative government's number one priority remains the economy. We recognize the importance of immigration to our economy and we value the contributions of skilled immigrants who add to our international competitiveness in the global economy. Our government remains committed to attracting the best and brightest to our country.

* * *

[Translation]

MICHEL BILODEAU

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I wish to pay tribute to the success of a passionate man who has put his heart and soul into the collective well-being of our children. His career is winding down, at least for now. Michel Bilodeau will be retiring this week, after five years at the helm of CHEO, the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario. This marks the end of a 34-year career in the health care sector. Earlier in his career, he was the CEO of health services at the Sisters of Charity of Ottawa. In recognition of his work, he was named personality of the week by the newspaper, *Le Droit*.

A fellow of the Canadian College of Health Leaders, Michel has always been very involved in Canada's health care sector, including sitting on boards for a number of organizations, including the Ontario Hospital Association and the Ontario Council of Teaching Hospitals.

I wish you, Michel, and your wife, Jocelyne, a wonderful retirement that is just busy enough. Thank you for everything, Michel. We hope you enjoy both your retirement and a few good bottles of wine.

* * *

● (1115)

[English]

VETERANS

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 1939 the world was again at war. Canada again answered the call. From the Battle of the Atlantic, to the Pacific theatre, to Juno Beach, and of course the liberation of the Netherlands, we fought above our weight.

Over a million Canadians and Newfoundlanders left to serve our country and more than 45,000 did not return, a truly remarkable sacrifice for a young nation with a population of only 11 million people.

These courageous men and women brought honour and respect to our country. It is our duty to preserve the legacy they handed to us and to ensure that their selfless dedication is never forgotten.

This Veterans' Week we will honour the generations of Canadians who bravely served this country and those who wear the Canadian uniform with pride today. Lest we forget.

Oral Questions

When will the Conservatives change their course of action and make job creation the priority? Where is the plan?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, job creation and economic growth have been and will continue to be our number one priority as a government.

We are pleased with the 600,000 jobs that have been created since the bottom of the recession in July 2009, but we deeply sympathize with anyone who lost their job this past month. As we have said all along, Canada is not immune from the global economic turbulence in the United States and Europe, but the House can be assured that this government will maintain its focus on jobs and economic growth.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, just like its jobs plan, that answer does not cut it.

The 72,000 Canadians who lost their jobs last month know that the government has abandoned them. There are almost 300,000 more unemployed Canadians today than in July 2008 and that was just before the recession that the government could not even see coming.

What is the Conservatives' message for those out of work Canadians and their families? Is it, "Just wait for the next corporate tax cuts and all will be well"? It has not worked and it will not work. Put people back to work now.

• (1120)

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, job creation and economic growth are the centrepiece of the next phase of Canada's economic action plan.

Right now, before the House, we have an important measure to help protect and create jobs such as the hiring credit for small business. What we need is for the New Democratic Party to stand up and support that initiative, to support small business, to support the economic engine of our economy.

We will remain focused on job creation. When will the NDP stand up and support that initiative to help our small businesses?

[Translation]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative numbers are clearly bogus. The government can play with statistics as much as it wants in order to mask its failure, but the reality is that the unemployment rate rose in October: 72,000 full-time jobs were lost.

Can the Conservatives stop pretending? The government's economic inaction plan is not creating jobs; it is creating victims. What will the government do about the 72,000 full-time jobs that were lost? Will it replace them with 18,000 part-time jobs and declare a victory?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our priority is job creation and economic growth. We will continue to work on our economic action plan. We have created 600,000 jobs in the past two years, but we will continue to work harder to grow the economy and create jobs. That is the real priority for Canadians and for our government.

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the number of troubling revelations about the Canada Revenue Agency is growing. We are talking about an extortion scheme and bribes paid by entrepreneurs in exchange for substantial tax reductions. The RCMP's investigation into this corruption, which was focusing on the Montreal office, has now been expanded to include other Quebec offices.

Can the government confirm the news and tell us what measures it has taken to tighten controls at the Canada Revenue Agency?

[English]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government appreciates that these are very serious allegations. An RCMP investigation into this matter is ongoing and CRA officials are co-operating fully. Many of these allegations date back more than a decade and some of these cases are currently making their way through the courts.

The integrity of our tax system is very important to all Canadians and we will take all steps necessary to ensure it is protected.

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the corruption investigation started in the Montreal office and now has spread. Other Quebec offices are under investigation. The growing scope of this investigation is raising questions about the state of the CRA as a whole. Canadians expect this agency to operate with impeccable integrity.

Conservatives need to clear the air about these troubling corruption allegations. Can the government tell us if it has asked for an investigation all across Canada and what is it doing to restore the confidence of Canadians?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we absolutely agree that the integrity of our tax system is important to all Canadians. Our government will take any steps necessary to ensure it is protected. An RCMP investigation into these matters is ongoing and CRA officials are co-operating fully.

[Translation]

AUDITOR GENERAL

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is becoming increasingly clear that the Conservatives, by toying with the process and appointing an anglophone auditor general, have violated one of our country's basic values. When the job posting states that proficiency in French and English is an essential hiring condition for the position of Auditor General, it does not mean that bilingualism is an asset qualification; it is an immutable condition. It is part of the qualifications. If the candidate is not bilingual, then the candidate should not be offered the job.

Will the Prime Minister recognize that the government erred in its flawed process and that the only thing left to do is to start from square one and appoint a bilingual auditor general?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we chose the best candidate who applied for the position of Auditor General. This candidate is highly qualified. He will do a good job.

[English]

What is increasingly clear is that the Liberal Party wants to use this issue to divide Canadians. This individual has committed to learning our second language and we should be very proud of that fact.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this tainted process is now affecting the Office of the Auditor General of Canada. I have just learned that Michel Dorais, who is one of the independent members of the audit committee and has been a senior public servant for over 30 years, has just resigned, stating that he cannot “continue to serve...while accepting that the incoming auditor general does not meet an essential requirement for the position.” Michel Dorais has spent his entire career fighting for bilingualism in the public service.

What are the Conservatives waiting for to show respect for all Canadians and for Michel Dorais as a bilingual individual?

● (1125)

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government strongly supports the official languages of this great country. We are pleased that the best candidate for the job has agreed to learn French.

What is interesting is the double standard of the Liberal Party. When the last Liberal prime minister, Paul Martin, appointed a unilingual anglophone as his finance minister was that member standing to complain? No. He was standing right behind that decision. If it is good enough for a minister of finance to be unilingually English, why is it not good enough for the best candidate to be appointed as Auditor General and who has committed to learning French?

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we do not want an auditor general for the government; we want an auditor general for Parliament and for all Canadians.

[English]

Now we learn that one of the two independent members of the AG internal audit committee, a distinguished ex-deputy minister of over 30 years, Michel Dorais, submitted his resignation this morning. Why? It is because for him bilingualism was no longer an issue of convenience or communication but a question of competency.

I have his letter in my hand. No more excuses. What must be done is to make the Prime Minister come to his senses and launch a new selection process. Canadians want that. What will he do about it?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have a new Auditor General, someone who embraces our official languages, someone who has committed to learning French, which is tremendously important.

Oral Questions

Eighty per cent of Canadians do not have bilingual qualifications. There is a role for them. This individual has committed to learning French, but, again, this is one rule for the public service and another rule for the Liberal Party. The Liberal Party was quite happy to have a unilingual anglophone who did not speak French, despite serving in Parliament for 30 years, and yet it puts another rule on everyone else. One rule for the Liberal Party and another rule for Canadians.

* * *

[Translation]

MINISTER OF STATE FOR SMALL BUSINESS AND TOURISM

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Michael Chamas, who is currently facing international drug trafficking charges, attended a Conservative fundraising event in 2008. The former foreign affairs minister and current Minister of State for Small Business and Tourism introduced this person, saying that what the party needed was support from people like him who believe in themselves, because in the end, they are the ones who will create wealth and jobs and really make something of themselves.

Will the Minister of State for Small Business and Tourism admit that his comments were completely inappropriate coming from a minister?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism), CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have publicly stated many times, the first and only time I met that individual was at a public event. That person asked to have a photo taken with me and I agreed. I have not seen that person since.

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Chamas donated \$5,000 in cash to the Papineau Conservative Party riding association. He even gave the former foreign affairs minister a giftwrapped parcel. The minister's assistant wrote that the RCMP had called to say that everyone present at that event had been placed under close surveillance.

Can the Minister of State for Small Business and Tourism tell us why he was there?

[English]

The Speaker: I am not sure questions about donations for political parties by private individuals count as administration of government, but I do see the government House leader rising to answer.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will simply say that we respect all aspects of the Elections Act and all those that relate to political financing.

Oral Questions

ETHICS

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to meeting with shady businessmen, Canadians expect more from cabinet ministers and expect good judgment from all of us in the House today.

However, the Minister of State for Small Business and Tourism was at a meeting with an accused gun-runner and where he saw cash-stuffed envelopes were being passed around.

Will the minister of state stop stonewalling and please tell Canadians what his role was in this fiasco?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is quite clear that if anybody has any information suggesting that any law has been broken, they should bring that forward, otherwise, they should resist the temptation to simply make smears, such as the opposition member wishes to do right now.

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, corruption at the CRA, cabinet minister carousing with accused gun smugglers and stonewalling on their G8 slush fund. It has not been a good week for Conservatives. In fact, one newspaper editorial put it this week, "Is the Prime Minister getting a queasy feeling? He should be. This isn't pretty". How true.

On Wednesday, the Muskoka minister failed to answer questions at committee and flailed around while he was there. However, he did promise one thing. He promised to send an evaluation of his pork barrel projects.

Will the minister table those documents today?

• (1130)

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the President of the Treasury Board attended committee, as I did and as three deputy ministers did, and answered all questions that members had on this issue.

The Auditor General has confirmed that all money was spent appropriately. Every dollar has been accounted for and all the money that was spent was on public infrastructure.

[Translation]

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on Wednesday, not only was the President of the Treasury Board asked to hand over the FedNor evaluation done by Tom Dodds, but he was also asked to give Parliament the project applications that went directly through his constituency office, to which the President of the Treasury Board responded, "Sure."

The person who controls our country's spending must keep his promises. When will we see these documents?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the President of the Treasury Board spent two hours answering all the members' questions in committee and also answered them here in this House. He responded to all the requests of the Auditor General and to each request for documents that she made.

The government works very hard to ensure that every dollar goes towards public projects, projects for municipalities and provincial infrastructure projects. And every dollar went to those needs.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the President of the Treasury Board's testimony left us with more questions than answers. As if by magic, of the 242 projects proposed, only 33 remained. Who in the government assessed the relevance of these projects? Why did no department document the process?

Canadians have a right to know, and this government has a duty to be transparent. When will we finally get the truth?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before committee, all the questions were given responses.

With respect to the 32 projects that received funding, all of them were evaluated by public servants of Infrastructure Canada who deemed that every one of those projects were eligible under the criteria established before the program. Each one of those 32 projects had a contribution agreement that was prepared by the public service and signed off by the relevant authorities.

The reality is that the President of the Treasury Board answered every question at committee. I regret that the New Democratic Party is not prepared to accept answers for those questions.

* * *

ATOMIC ENERGY OF CANADA LIMITED

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the government quietly revealed that it will spend more than \$800 million on AECL this year alone.

Many people may say that massive overspending on the nuclear crown corporation is par for the course for the government, but what is different this time is that it has already sold most of the business to a private company.

Why is the minister hanging taxpayers out to dry while subsidizing privatized nuclear power?

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the reason that we have sold this to a strong private sector partner is precisely for that reason. We agree that AECL is costing taxpayers too much money and that is why we moved ahead.

Actually, if the NDP had its way, there would not be a nuclear job in this country. It would cost Canadians 30,000 jobs.

We are moving ahead, protecting taxpayers and protecting industry at the same time.

[Translation]

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government has botched the sale of Atomic Energy of Canada Limited. Furthermore, it was not transparent about the process and we are now seeing the results. We have learned that the sale of the CANDU reactor division has cost \$280 million and that the return on investment was only \$15 million. That is a net loss of \$265 million for Canadians, who had already paid \$21 billion to support Atomic Energy of Canada Limited ever since it was created.

Starting in 2012, will this government stop running Canada's energy resources at a loss?

[English]

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is taking a responsible approach. We are protecting taxpayers' interests while ensuring the future of the nuclear industry in Canada.

My colleague mentioned that there are 2,000 jobs in Mississauga alone that are connected to the nuclear industry. We are proud to protect those jobs. The NDP keeps talking about jobs for Canadians. We are protecting those jobs.

In this transition, I need to point out that the costs are actually lower than they were initially estimated to be. We have saved hundreds of Canadian jobs through doing that.

As the member mentioned, the costs associated with this divestiture are well-known to the public.

• (1135)

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, late last night, the heavy hand of the state came smashing down to destroy a great Canadian institution. It was a sham, it was a travesty and it would surely offend the sensibilities of anybody who would call themselves a democrat.

All that is left now is to pay for the minister's ideological zeal to kneecap the Canadian Wheat Board. With no money for social programs, no money for affordable housing and no money for the environment, where will the government find \$500 million to live out the fantasy of that minister's obsession to destroy the Canadian Wheat Board?

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, is it just me or is there a bit of irony in the fact that the member opposite wants to legalize marijuana but criminalize grain?

I also need to point out that we did meet last night and one of the amendments that the NDP wanted to bring forward, which the Liberals supported, would actually have jailed farmers again. We were not prepared to go there.

Farmers woke up this morning thrilled to finally hear that Bill C-18 has been returned to the House. We will soon have a debate at

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report stage and third reading. Farmers only have a few more sleeps until they have freedom.

AUDITOR GENERAL OF CANADA

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is quite straightforward. Why did the Conservative government not follow the example set by its own leader, the current Prime Minister, in its choice of a nominee for the next auditor general? Why did it not respect the criteria published in the *Canada Gazette* and recommend a nominee proficient in Canada's two official languages, a requirement it set at the start of the process?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I am sure the hon. member is well-aware, there is no language requirement in the Auditor General Act, which is the act that governs the Auditor General.

Regardless of that, we did search out bilingual candidates. However, at the end of the day, when looking at all of the different merits of the candidates, we chose the person who was the most meritorious, which is what one must do in a position like this. We stand by that appointment.

Mr. Ferguson has already promised to learn French and wants to learn French. The hon. member should give him the benefit of the doubt.

[Translation]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a few days ago I asked the government if it realized that it was opening Pandora's box by failing to observe its own selection criteria for the next Auditor General. This morning, we caught a glimpse of the first repercussions of their stubbornness: the Commissioner of Official Languages, the President of the Public Service Commission of Canada, all opposition parties and a Conservative senator are opposed. And now a member of the Auditor General's internal audit committee has resigned.

Is it not time to stop this stubbornness?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have already said that we picked the most qualified candidate, a candidate who wants to learn French and who will do so. He is a candidate who can do the job on behalf of Canadians. We support this candidate and the Liberals should support him as well.

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, over 71,000 Canadians lost their full-time jobs just last month. We now have 600,000 fewer full-time jobs than in August of 2008.

Doug Porter of BMO said that "losses of this magnitude are extremely rare, aside from recessionary periods".

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Scotiabank said, “The magnitude and breadth of the decline is disconcerting here”.

This is a jobless recovery and a human recession. When will the Conservatives invest in a real plan to create jobs and help Canadians get back to work?

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, we sympathize with all Canadians who lost their jobs. However, I have to note that Canada is in a very good position when we compare it to other countries across the world. In fact, we have been saying for over a year that we are not immune to outside pressures like what is going on in Europe at this point.

The IMF and the OECD said that we would be the fastest growing G7 economy in the next couple of years. A Reuters poll of 350 economists also said very recently, “Canada should see some of the strongest rates of growth compared with its G7 peers this year and next”.

● (1140)

[Translation]

AUDITOR GENERAL

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government has once again shown its contempt for Canadian francophones by choosing an auditor general who does not meet the job criteria in the government's own posting.

When the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst asked the Conservatives about the contract awarded to the headhunting firm, they simply did not answer the question, as usual.

This morning we learned that the taxpayers spent \$150,000 on finding someone who does not have all the necessary qualifications. How do the Conservatives justify this waste?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have already said, we looked for the most qualified candidate who has the right skills for this position. The candidate went through a very rigorous process and said in this House and in the Senate that it is important to learn French, that he wants to learn French and that he is going to learn French.

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Mr. Speaker, even the good friend of the Prime Minister's former director of communications—yes, he who was able to speak both official languages—Conservative Senator Housakos, is against the appointment of this Auditor General. There is no end to the problems with this appointment process: the headhunters did not post the job posting in French; \$150,000 was wasted; and the Commissioner of Official Languages is going to investigate the matter. Confusion reigns in the Conservative ranks because the process was flawed.

The Auditor General has promised to learn French within a year. What are francophones supposed to do in the meantime?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we have said, he has

already started to learn French. He has the support Sheila Fraser, the former Auditor General.

[English]

The interim Liberal leader in the province of New Brunswick supports this appointment as well, as someone who is in the opposition but still supports the appointment. He knows Mr. Ferguson very well. He has worked with him. Mr. Ferguson has the qualifications to be an excellent candidate for Auditor General. I encourage the hon. member to think the same way as reasonable people do.

[Translation]

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mrs. Djaouda Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Quebec's National Assembly unanimously agreed that the government should keep the gun registry data. The government is accountable to the chiefs of police who use it thousands of times a day, to victims of crime and to Quebec taxpayers, who have already paid for this registry.

Why is this government refusing to side with victims and give this data to the provinces?

[English]

Ms. Candice Hoepfner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the data contained in the long gun registry are incomplete. The data are flawed and are increasingly more flawed and incomplete. We have committed to Canadians that we will end the long gun registry and that means destroying the data.

I am disappointed in the NDP for penalizing its MPs from the Thunder Bay area for supporting their constituents and voting to end the long gun registry. I hope that will change as the bill goes forward.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is not an acceptable answer for the victims of the shooting at the École Polytechnique or for victims of other shootings. The gun registry is essential to public safety. The provinces and chiefs of police have said it over and over. They use the registry every day. Yet this government is willing to get rid of the data in the registry for no good reason.

Will the government reverse its reckless decision so that we can avoid another shooting like the one at the École Polytechnique?

[English]

Ms. Candice Hoepfner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we are very proud to have 11 active police officers and former police officers in our party. We listen to police officers. That is why we have given provisions, for example in Bill C-10, that would actually help fight violent crime and gun crime. We want to focus on ensuring guns do not get into the wrong hands and that those kinds of tragedies that happened in Montreal will not happen again. The long gun registry does nothing to keep guns out of people's hands.

• (1145)

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today we are reminded of how fragile the global economic recovery is and how that will impact Canada. Even though it is from outside our borders, we recognize the ongoing economic weakness in the United States and the very real economic consequences caused by European governments that ran massive deficits that will all be a challenge for Canada.

While the NDP, disappointingly, wants to engage in reckless, free-wheeling deficit spending, the type hurting Europe now, this government has a responsible plan. Could the parliamentary secretary talk about our responsible plan for the economy and jobs?

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while Canada's economy has created nearly 600,000 net new jobs since July 2009, we do sympathize with Canadians who have recently lost their jobs.

As we have said all along, we are not immune to the global economic turbulence being felt by our largest trading partners, Europe and the United States. As witnessed by events this week in Greece, the global economic recovery remains very fragile.

That is why we are working to implement the next phase of Canada's economic action plan with measures to help protect and create jobs, such as the hiring credit for small businesses. While the NDP is voting against all of those measures and the economy, our Conservative government will continue to do what is necessary and responsible to protect Canadians—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue.

* * *

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the list of problems with the catastrophic F-35 program just keeps on growing. The safety of our pilots is compromised, costs are skyrocketing, the planes do not meet our needs and they cost so much that we cannot buy as many as we need.

My questions is simple. How can a plane that is slower than the one it is replacing, that could injure or even kill our pilots, and that we cannot communicate with in the Canadian north actually be the best for our troops?

[English]

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the extensive and rigorous competition has taken place. Two airplanes squared off, and the F-35 won the competition. That is the best aircraft for our men and women well into the future and to ensure that our sovereignty is maintained in the future, as well.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the procurement tailspin continues.

Now we learn our pilots will not even be able to learn how to fly the F-35s in Canada. According to DND documents, pilot training

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will have to be moved from Cold Lake, Alberta to a facility in Florida run by Lockheed Martin.

The government is throwing billions at a plane that cannot fly here for pilots who cannot train here. Why is the government buying planes that take training jobs out of Canadian cities? Why is it abandoning Cold Lake?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member should know that in order to get traction, he should have his facts straight.

Long-term training on the F-35s will take place in Canada, just as currently is done with the CF-18s. It is reasonable that Canadians will do initial training with those from whom we purchase the aircraft, which has always been the case.

We will ensure that our men and women in uniform have the best equipment and the best training to do their job safely and effectively.

* * *

SHIP RECYCLING

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Marine Atlantic sold two ferries on the condition that they would be broken down ethically. Instead, these boats wound up in Alang, India, which is one of the most dangerous shipyards in the world. It is known for its environmental and human rights violations. Last year around 27 workers were killed in the shipyard alone.

We are shipping dangerous asbestos overseas, and we are disposing our waste with no regard for human safety. My question is, how could the government let this happen?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to supporting Marine Atlantic.

We are investing \$500 million to help Marine Atlantic renew its fleet and shore facilities. As a crown corporation, Marine Atlantic is arm's-length from the Government of Canada and is responsible for the management of its own operations.

The disposal of the MV *Joseph and Clara Smallwood* and MV *Caribou* was an operational decision made by Marine Atlantic.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, why are we sending our ships to be destroyed in such a hazardous environment when we have some of the world's finest shipyards here in Canada?

The government is literally shipping our jobs overseas, and has no regard for human safety and the environment. We know that the Alang shipyard employs children. We know it breaks up the ships on the beach. These ships are probably filled with asbestos.

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This is not the kind of Canada we want. Why is the government letting good jobs leave Canada to be completed in one of the world's deadliest shipyards?

• (1150)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not know why the hon. member wants the Government of Canada, politicians, to interfere in the daily operational decisions of Marine Atlantic, which is an arm's-length crown corporation. I do not know if she wants to politicize what should be an arm's-length group.

The disposal of the MV *Joseph and Clara Smallwood* and the MV *Caribou* was an operational decision made by Marine Atlantic.

Our government is committed to supporting Marine Atlantic. We are committed to renewing its fleet and its shore facilities. We ask that the NDP finally come around to supporting us in our work on that.

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CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food.

We know that for years the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources has run a campaign of hate against the Canadian Wheat Board, the very board he took a solemn oath to uphold. That is one thing, but why does the minister himself betray the facts, even misinform committee? He stated before committee, "They've", meaning the board, "always said 'now is not a good time. The directors don't really want to hear from you'."

I have had three invitations from the board over three years. Why does the minister not tell the facts?

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was very disappointed earlier this month. The minister was going to Russia. He had been asked to attend a board meeting. I think the board knew he was going to be away when it sent the invitation. He responded by saying that his parliamentary secretary would be very glad to attend the board meeting. I was very disappointed because the board said it did not want to meet with me.

We have finally come forward with Bill C-18. This legislation would deliver on our government's long-standing commitment to give western Canadian farmers the marketing freedom they so richly deserve.

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PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonaville—Gander—Grand Falls—Windor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, regarding the long delays for security checks processed through what we call the vulnerable sector check, I appreciate the extra screening to protect the most vulnerable, but the system is now way overburdened.

The manager of this RCMP service said that in the last year alone, the requests went from 2,500 to 40,000. A constituent of mine

applied last February 24 and only received her clearance last week. Members will get the idea just how serious this issue is.

There are many people who are unable to get jobs. Many people are unable to volunteer. Will the government now commit to hire more staff at this RCMP essential service?

Ms. Candice Hoepfner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we do appreciate and value the work that volunteers do as well as the necessity for people who are getting employment to have their security checks done quickly. We have introduced measures that will assist the RCMP in doing that. We encourage the RCMP to continue to work together with its provincial and municipal counterparts effectively and quickly to get the security checks done for individuals.

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FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week TD Bank became the second major Canadian bank to quit using the independent banking ombudsman, and we have heard nothing from the government. The ombudsman is there to stand up for the everyday consumer against the big banks. It protects families when banks make errors in dealing with their accounts.

If the government is not standing up for everyday consumers, then who is?

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, currently all banks are required to have consumer complaints procedures in place and have a third party dispute handling body. However, there is a variation in procedures used and this is a concern for us and consumers.

To better protect consumers, we are forcing banks to belong to government approved independent third party bodies. We are establishing uniform regulatory standards for internal complaints procedures. We are giving the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada the authority to monitor and enforce compliance. We have passed legislation for this and are now finalizing regulations.

Unfortunately, the NDP voted against all of it.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is a lot of talk there, but not much of an answer, especially for families who are tired of being treated unfairly by the big banks.

By doing nothing, the government is giving the banks a get-out-of-jail-free card on consumer protection. Overseas, our finance minister sings the virtues of Canada's strong banking regulations, while he lets them slide here at home.

Why will the government not stand up for Canadian families instead of giving the big banks a free pass?

• (1155)

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I just said, it is important that the NDP actually support measures that help to protect Canadian families in this area.

While I am on my feet, let me remind Canadians about how the NDP feels about jobs and the economy. It is pushing a \$10 billion tax hike on employers that would kill Canadian jobs, a massive CPP payroll tax hike that would kill jobs, an anti-trade agenda that would limit Canada's exports and kill jobs. Why is the NDP voting against a job creating measure like the hiring credit for small businesses?

The NDP needs to explain its anti-job, anti-trade, anti-Canada agenda.

VETERANS

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as Veterans' Week approaches, Canadians from across the country wear poppies as a symbol of remembrance. Poppies are our commitment to never forget the sacrifices made by our men and women in uniform. Yesterday, Canadians were shocked, dismayed, and I am sure angered, by the news of the theft of a poppy donation box.

Could the Minister of Veterans Affairs please comment on these disturbing reports?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Etobicoke Centre for this question and also for his work for veterans and their families.

I want to commend the Royal Canadian Legion for its efforts in raising money through the poppy fund. This money, raised during the campaign, helps to provide additional care for our veterans and their families. The recent theft of the poppy box is appalling to all Canadians. I want those responsible to know that not only should they be ashamed of their actions, but they should discover the actions of Canada's true heroes.

It is our duty as Canadians to show respect and honour the sacrifices of those who served and those who continue to serve our country. We lost two only last week. As Veterans' Week begins, let us say that we will—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Etobicoke North.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mrs. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while the Minister of the Environment might feel he does not owe Canadians an apology for dismantling environmental monitoring programs, he certainly owes them an explanation. The minister continues to repeat his talking points about the ozone data centre's world class services, but fails to answer the questions he is asked.

Will he finally come clean and tell us what is being cut from the ozone program, and why?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, I thank my colleague for her question, but it is the same answer. Environment Canada will continue to monitor

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ozone. The World Ozone and Ultraviolet Radiation Data Centre will continue to provide world-class ozone services.

Again, I make no apologies for finding the most cost-effective ways for the government to protect Canada's environment.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since March 31, Environment Canada has turned off the tap on funding to the Lake Superior binational program. Not only is this program designed to restore degraded areas and protect this unique headwater from pollution and urbanization but it is also part of long-standing commitments between Canada and the U.S. to protect and restore our Great Lakes.

Why is the government threatening Canada-U.S. relations by pulling the plug on this critical environmental initiative? When will it turn the tap back on?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, every assumption in that question is absolutely false. We are in the midst of negotiating a renewed Great Lakes water quality agreement. I would advise the member that if she wishes to know more about our plans, to contact me at the department.

CANADIAN FORCES

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier this year Canada responded rapidly and strongly after the UN Security Council passed a resolution to protect civilians who were being attacked by the Gadhafi regime in Libya. In less than 24 hours CF-18s were airborne from 3 Wing Bagotville en route to their operating base in Trapani, Italy, along with strategic air-to-air refueling support from 8 Wing Trenton's Polaris aircraft. Canada also sent a frigate to patrol the central Mediterranean.

Could the associate minister of national defence please inform the House when our heroes are coming home?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for this very important question and his steadfast support for our brave men and women.

Our military heroes are returning home this week after a successful mission. Our personnel helped to enforce a no-fly zone and an arms embargo. Because of their hard work, the world is a better and safer place.

Today, I will be in Bagotville with the Chief of the Defence Staff to welcome home our CF-18 pilots. Military heroes are also returning to CFB Trenton later tonight and CFB Greenwood tomorrow.

Bravo Zulu to all our brave men and women for a job well done.

Government Orders

● (1200)

*[Translation]***INFRASTRUCTURE**

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this government is once again demonstrating that it does not have any sort of plan to create jobs, particularly in the regions. Transport Canada refuses to repair the Chandler and Carleton wharves in my riding, despite the fact that their repair would attract 200 jobs. The department does not even want to pay for a study to assess the actual state of the wharves.

Why is this government prepared to sacrifice 200 jobs and the economy of the Gaspé?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting that the hon. member would ask such a question. Our government has invested in all sorts of infrastructure and created jobs across the country. It is part of our economic action plan. The NDP opposed all these measures. Now, we have entered the second phase of our economic action plan and the NDP is, once again, opposing these efforts. It is shameful.

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QUEBEC NATION

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, 30 years—to the day—after the “night of long knives”, contempt for Quebec is as strong as ever in Ottawa. Appointing a unilingual Supreme Court justice and a unilingual Auditor General, destroying the data from the firearms registry, imposing a regressive, extremely costly justice model, and to top it all off, reducing Quebec's political weight all prove that recognizing the Quebec nation was nothing but smoke and mirrors.

Will the government admit that it is building Canada at the expense of Quebecers and that Quebec sovereignty alone can put an end to this contempt?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism), CPC): Mr. Speaker, absolutely not. I am a Quebecer and a Canadian, and proud to be both. Quebec can flourish within this country. That being said, I would remind my Bloc Québécois colleagues that Quebec represents 23% of the Canadian population and has 23% of the seats in the House of Commons. That is what it means to show fairness and respect to Quebecers.

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*[English]***POINTS OF ORDER****ORAL QUESTIONS**

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. During question period today there was some mention from the Liberal Party of a gentleman by the name of Michel Dorais. Further to this topic of discussion, I would like to inform the House that Michel Dorais donated in 2009 to former Liberal leader Michael Ignatieff.

I certainly make no allegations of the partisan leanings of the individual; I simply find that the House should be informed of these facts. I table these documents.

The Speaker: Are the documents in question in both official languages?

[Translation]

Hon. Tony Clement: Mr. Speaker, yes, they are in both official languages.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I rise on the same point of order. I find it highly irregular. I appreciate that the government spares no cost in terms of tax dollars in researching the background of individuals. It was a legitimate question in regard to the actions of the government. The amount of disrespect that the minister put has cast a shadow—

The Speaker: Order. Tabling of documents. The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS*[Translation]***EYYOU MARINE REGION LAND CLAIMS AGREEMENT**

Mr. Greg Rickford (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the Eeyou Marine Region Land Claims Agreement.

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*[English]***GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS**

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to four petitions.

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● (1205)

*[Translation]***BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations and I would ask for unanimous consent for the following motion:

That the bill on notice entitled “An Act to give effect to the Agreement between the Crees of Eeyou Itstchee and Her Majesty the Queen in right of Canada concerning the Eeyou Marine Region” be permitted to be introduced today.

The Speaker: Does the hon. Leader of the Government in the House of Commons have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed

(Motion agreed to.)

* * *

[English]

EEYOU MARINE REGION LAND CLAIMS AGREEMENT ACT

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (for the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-22, An Act to give effect to the Agreement between the Crees of Eeyou Itchee and Her Majesty the Queen in right of Canada concerning the Eeyou Marine Region.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

FINANCE

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee on Finance in relation to Bill C-13, an act to implement certain provisions of the 2011 budget as updated on June 6, 2011 and other measures.

The committee has studied the bill and has decided to report the bill back to the House without amendments.

BILL C-18

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the legislative committee on Bill C-18, an act to reorganize the Canadian Wheat Board and to make consequential and related amendments to certain Acts.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I want to be clear that the bill that the committee is reporting on is the bill where the Conservative government violated farmers' rights by not allowing a vote under the current legislation before the House? Is this also the committee that failed to hold hearings in western Canada and give farmers a say?

The Speaker: Order, please. I can confirm to the House that this is Bill C-18 and it is from the legislative committee that was struck for Bill C-18.

* * *

[Translation]

EEYOU MARINE REGION LAND CLAIMS AGREEMENT ACT

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with regard to the bill introduced earlier today, I wish to seek unanimous consent for the following motion:

Government Orders

That, notwithstanding any standing order or usual practices of this House, Bill C-22, An Act to give effect to the Agreement between the Crees of Eeyou Itchee and Her Majesty the Queen in right of Canada concerning the Eeyou Marine Region shall be deemed to have been read a second time and referred to a Committee of the Whole, deemed considered in Committee of the Whole, deemed reported without amendment, deemed concurred in at the report stage and deemed read a third time and passed.

The Speaker: Does the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons have the unanimous consent of the House to propose the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time, considered in committee of the whole, reported without amendment, concurred in, read the third time and passed)

* * *

[English]

PETITIONS

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have today a petition to present from literally thousands of Canadians across Canada.

The petitioners point out that they are appalled by reports that Canadian mining and oil and gas companies are involved in human rights and environmental violations around the world. In particular, they are embarrassed at the Canadian government's lack of action against such violations in Eastern Congo, leading to the use of the term "the iron fist of Canada" to describe the Canadian government's support of activities harmful to Congolese communities.

Therefore, the petitioners request that the House the Commons legislate the standards for Canadian mining companies operating outside of Canada to be the same as the standards they must reach operating inside of Canada. This would include, but not be limited to, making participation of corporate social responsibility, review process, allowing the corporate social responsibility to produce legally binding judgments and to include the violation of human rights and other harm to communities as part of any legally binding accountability mechanism and to revitalize the spirit and the principle of Bill C-300 of the last Parliament to hold Canadian extractive companies to the standards of decency Canadians expect of their government—

• (1210)

The Speaker: Order, please. I remind the hon. member and all hon. members that the practice for petitions is to not read the petitions and to simply give a succinct summary thereof.

The hon. member for Etobicoke North on a petition.

Government Orders

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition regarding chronic cerebrospinal venous insufficiency, or CCSVI. Over 15,000 procedures have now been performed in over 60 countries. In May 2010, my colleague from St. Paul's and I brought the fight for clinical trials and the registry for CCSVI to Parliament. Almost a year later in March 2011, the government announced a registry, although it would not start until July 2012. In June 2011, at last the government announced clinical trials.

I want to be very clear. All we have right now is announcements. What we need is action. Canadians with MS cannot afford to wait.

The petitioners call for the Minister of Health to consult experts actively engaged in diagnosis and treatment of CCSVI, to undertake phase 3 clinical trials on an urgent basis with a large patient participation in multiple centres across Canada and to require follow-up care.

[Translation]

TRAINING AT FLIGHT SCHOOLS

Mrs. Djaouda Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition signed by 2,000 of my constituents. These signatures were collected by Longueuil's Comité anti-pollution des avions. The petition is calling for a ban on training flights over residential areas. The petition is just one indication of the importance of this issue, which affects Saint-Bruno as much as it does Saint-Hubert.

I intend to demonstrate goodwill and work with all those affected to find a solution for the well-being of my constituents.

[English]

INTERNATIONAL AID

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonaville—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour of presenting this petition. It is the first one of its kind that I have presented. It is a petition to the Government of Canada highlighting Canada becoming a global leader in aid effectiveness.

In 2009, \$4.73 billion went into aid, but some of my constituents want the Government of Canada to be more proactive on transparency, creativity and also accountability, doing things such as calling on the G8 to standardize tracking and reporting major international commitments. They also call for an innovation fund worth \$200 million per year and new and riskier approaches to development, which is the proactive element of this, as well as being very transparent. Certainly CIDA projects have been completely transparent in the last few years.

I want to congratulate the petitioners in the towns of Grand Falls—Windsor, Twillingate and Summerford for sending me this petition.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the following question will be answered today: No. 143.

[Text]

Question No. 143—**Mr. Scott Simms:**

With regard to the Service Canada Employment Insurance (EI) modernization plan: (a) what are the itemized costs incurred for operating the EI Processing Unit in Gander, Newfoundland and Labrador (NL); (b) what are the itemized costs incurred for operating the EI Processing Unit in St. John's, NL; (c) what are the itemized costs for transferring the EI Processing Unit from Gander to St. John's including, but not limited to, severance pay, relocation allowances, building costs for the new facility (Pippy Place); (d) what are the itemized costs for transferring the EI Processing Unit from Grand Falls-Windsor to St. John's; (e) how many employees are working in each EI Processing Unit in NL, including the units in (i) Gander, (ii) Grand Falls-Windsor, (iii) St. John's; (f) what are the itemized cost savings realized by consolidating all NL EI Processing sites in St. John's; (g) what criteria were used in deciding that St. John's is the most appropriate and cost-effective location for an EI Processing Centre in NL, as opposed to Gander; and (h) what is the estimated time frame for the closing of the EI Processing Units in Gander and Grand Falls-Windsor?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with regard to (a), the costs are as follows: salary, \$1,607,417; non-salary, \$207,352.

With regard to (b), the estimated expenditures for the EI processing unit in St. John's are as follows: salary, \$3,046,616; non-salary, \$636,604.

With regard to (c), itemized costs related to the consolidation of EI processing sites are not yet available. Service Canada is working with regions to determine relocation, accommodation and other associated costs. The overall transition, including the allocation of resources, will be business-driven, aligned with Service Canada's automation agenda.

With regard to (d), please refer to the response provided above for (c).

With regard to (e), as of September 20, 2011, Gander had 32 employees; Grand Falls-Windsor is not a designated EI processing site; St. John's had 58 employees; Corner Brook had 12 employees; and Happy Valley-Goose Bay had 9 employees.

With regard to (f), Service Canada has made considerable progress in modernizing how EI is processed, resulting in significant savings.

Processing costs have been reduced as a result of our automation agenda by almost 30% since 2003. Current EI modernization plans will yield over 15% in further cost savings over the next three years.

Specific itemized cost savings realized by consolidating all NL EI processing sites to St. John's are not yet available. These savings will be confirmed as site-specific decisions related to workforce, accommodation and timing have been determined.

With regard to (g), each of the 22 sites was chosen following a careful review in which both national and regional perspectives were taken into consideration. This is a national program, and many factors were considered, such as, among others, existing labour force, skill availability, bilingual capability, and real estate.

With regard to (h), no dates have been set to formally close the existing EI processing centres. The transition from 120 to 22 sites will happen gradually over the next three years.

The overall transition will be business-driven, aligned with Service Canada's automation agenda.

A workforce management strategy is in effect to assist with planned personnel changes, which will include anticipated attrition, retirement, reassignments and training.

Opportunities for transitioning into other business lines will also be available for some EI employees currently working in sites with other lines of business.

This will mean that positions in the consolidated centres will be filled as vacancies are created in the sites that will not be EI processing centres.

* * *

[English]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if Questions Nos. 140, 141 and 144 could be made orders for returns, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 140—**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:**

With respect to development of the oil sands, its impacts on the environment and surrounding communities, and the economic effects of these impacts; (a) what, if any, steps has the government taken to establish air emission limits or air quality standards to achieve the World Health Organization's Air Quality Guidelines to protect air quality and human health; (b) what, if any, steps has the government's sector-by-sector approach taken to regulate carbon emissions in the oil sands to ensure the oil sands industry makes appropriate reductions in its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions to contribute to Canada's GHG emission reduction goal of 17% below the 2005 level; (c) what, if any, studies has the government undertaken to examine the effect of the oil sands expansion on (i) GHG emissions, (ii) Canada's ability to meet its GHG emission reduction goals, (iii) Canada's contribution to the goal of staying below a 2°C increase in global average surface temperature, relative to the pre-industrial level, as articulated at the G8 meeting in L'Aquila, Italy and at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change negotiations through the Copenhagen Accord in December 2009 and the Cancun Agreements in December 2010, (iv) the full suite of sustainability criteria, including environmental, economic and social sustainability, and (v) what were the results of any studies identified in (c) (i), (c)(ii), (c)(iii), and (c)(iv); (d) what, if any, studies has the government undertaken to examine (i) the scope of oil sands expansion if the oil sands sector is not required to deliver its proportional share of GHG reductions, (ii) the impacts such a decision would have on other sectors' allowable GHG emissions, (iii) whether other sectors of the Canadian economy would have to do more than their proportional share to reduce emissions, (iv) what were the results of any studies identified in (d)(i), (d)(ii), and (d) (iii); (e) what, if any, studies has the government undertaken to assess safety, risks and effectiveness of carbon capture and storage (CCS) and what were the results of any identified study; (f) what, if any, studies, has the government undertaken to assess safety, risks and effectiveness of enhanced oil recovery and what were the

Government Orders

results of any identified study; (g) what, if any, studies has the government undertaken to examine the possible impact of CCS technology on GHG emissions in the oil sands, (i) what are the government's projections for the level of reductions that is feasible with CCS, (ii) what are the government's projections for how CCS technology would impact oil sands emissions by 2020 and by 2050, (iii) does the government project that an oil sands industry equipped with CCS technology would be able to meet the specific reductions targets established by the government for 2020 and 2050; (h) how does the government plan to address emissions that cannot be reduced by CCS, such as (i) emissions from smaller in situ projects, (ii) mine fleet emissions, (iii) tailings fugitives; (i) what, if any, steps has the government taken to set an economy-wide price on carbon, rather than a sector-by-sector regulatory approach, as a means to reducing GHG emissions from the oil sands; (j) what, if any, steps has the government taken to adopt regulations to require all new oil sands facilities that began operations in 2010 or later to implement full-scale CCS by 2015, and will projects for which CCS is not an option still be approved by the government, whenever such approval is required for the project to proceed; (k) what, if any, steps has the government taken to quantify and eliminate air and water pollution discharge from tailings ponds by 2020 through Section 36(3) of the Fisheries Act (i) by identifying substances associated with tailings ponds as toxic under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act (CEPA), and (ii) what would be the projected impacts on the environment, human health, industry, and migratory birds of such legislative measures; (l) what, if any steps has the government taken to implement its phase II monitoring plan (i) when will data collection of begin, (ii) when will data be available for inclusion in decision-making processes, (iii) will monitoring programs be reformed in advance of any new oil sands expansion; (m) what steps is the government taking to ensure sufficient capacity exists to (i) implement the Northwest Territories Water Strategy, (ii) help reform water monitoring in the Mackenzie River Basin; (n) what, if any, steps has the government taken to develop a federal emergency response plan to strengthen the Mackenzie River Basin Transboundary Waters Master Agreement in case of a failure of a tailings lake dyke; (o) are Mackenzie River Basin residents in particular and Canadians in general financially protected from a major industrial accident such as the failure of a tailings dyke and, (i) if so, why are both groups protected, (ii) if not, why, and does the government plan to implement measures to ensure these groups are protected; (p) what, if any, studies has the government undertaken to identify critical habitats for woodland caribou in north-eastern Alberta, and what were the conclusions of each study, including the results of consultations with First Nations on conservation of woodland caribou; (q) what, if any, studies has the government undertaken to determine the level of oil sands development that is consistent with caribou conservation in Alberta; and (r) does the government plan (i) to conduct a comprehensive health study of the impacts of oil sands development on surrounding communities, (ii) to identify and implement measures to reduce any health impacts discovered in such a study?

(Return tabled)

*Speaker's Ruling***Question No. 141—Ms. Kirsty Duncan:**

With respect to climate change and international and national security: (a) what does the government project are the potential impacts on currently stable regions of the world of such climate change-related phenomena as, but not limited to, (i) rises in sea level, (ii) increases in extreme weather events, (iii) increases in the spread of infectious disease, (iv) increases in environmental refugees; (b) what does the government project will be (i) the consequences of the impacts identified in (a)(ii), (a)(iii), and (a)(iv) on domestic military missions, (ii) the consequences of (a)(i), (a)(ii), (a)(iii), (a)(iv) and (b)(i) in terms of the military's capacity to respond and the availability of troops for missions not related to conflicts induced by climate change-related phenomena; (c) what does the government project will be the potential impacts on already-weakened states of such climate change-related phenomena as, but not limited to, (i) sea level rise, (ii) extreme weather events, (iii) the spread of infectious diseases; (d) what does the government project will be the extent of the effects climate impacts could have on already-weakened states, including, but not limited to, (i) expanded ungoverned spaces, (ii) further weakened and failed states, (iii) increased conflicts, (iv) increased migrations; (e) what does the government project will be the impact of the effects identified in (d) on Canada's national security; (f) which nations does the government project will be most affected by climate change, (i) what is the government's assessment of each such country's capacity to adapt or cope, (ii) what, if any, action is Canada taking to strengthen the capacity of weak governments to better cope with societal needs projected to arise as a result of climate change-related impacts, (iii) what is the government's assessment of possible security risks if Canada does contribute to international efforts related to (f)(i) and (f)(ii); (g) has DND or the Canadian military conducted any studies of how climate change can have a multiplier effect on instability in unstable regions of the world and, if so, what were these studies and their results; (h) what are the studies, along with their dates and results, undertaken by the government concerning the possible national security risks of climate change, and what specific observations were included in these studies concerning the impacts the research might have for government efforts pertaining to, but not limited to, (i) the encouragement of regional cooperation, (ii) the improvement of international confidence, (iii) the improvement of public relations; (i) what, if any, departments have participated in an inter-departmental process to develop a policy to reduce national security risks resulting from climate change and (j) if departments have participated in such a process, have all agencies involved with climate science, treaty negotiations, economic policy, and national security been involved in the process, and what were the results, (ii) if departments have not participated in such a process, why not; (j) what, if any, strategies has the government developed, including the dates of each completed strategy, concerning the integration of the national security consequences of climate change into national security and national defence strategies, and if the government has developed such strategies, (i) do the strategies examine the capabilities of the Canadian military to respond to the consequences of climate change, (ii) do the strategies include guidance to military planners to assess climate change risks on future missions, (iii) do the strategies provide guidance for updating defence plans based on new assessments; (k) for each strategy identified in (j), what are (i) the details of any testing of the strategy that has been conducted, (ii) the details of the implementation of the strategy, including, but not limited to, working with allies and partners to incorporate climate mitigation strategies, capacity building, and relevant research and development; (l) what are the government's plans as concerns its engagement in global partnerships intended to help less developed nations build the capacity and resiliency to better manage climate impacts; and (m) what, if any, conferences has DND undertaken with respect to climate change and national security, if no such conferences have been undertaken, why not, and, if any such conferences have been undertaken, (i) who participated, (ii) what topics were covered, (iii) what findings were made, (iv) what recommendations were made, (v) what follow-up has occurred?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 144—Mr. Philip Toone:

With regard to Service Canada programs and services within the riding of Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine: (a) what is the current baseline for service; (b) what value-for-money studies, reviews or summaries have been undertaken relating to Service Canada programs; (c) what are the recommended changes in Service Canada programs in Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine; (d) what is the level of spending on Service Canada operations in the riding for this year and 2010–2011; (e) what is the planned level of spending on Service Canada operations in the riding for 2012–2013 and 2013–2014; (f) what are the numbers for Full Time Equivalents (FTEs) for this year and 2010–2011 in the riding; (g) what are the planned numbers of FTEs for 2012–2013 and 2013–2014 in the riding; (h) how many clients did Service Canada serve in the riding this year and 2010–2011; (i) what is the number of inquiries per

FTE for this year and 2010–2011; and (j) what is the demographic make-up of the clients served in the riding this year and in 2010–2011?

(Return tabled)

[English]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER**BILL C-317 INCOME TAX ACT—SPEAKER'S RULING**

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the point of order raised by the hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh concerning ways and means proceedings on Bill C-317, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (labour organizations) standing in the name of the hon. member for South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale.

I would like to thank the hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh for having raised this matter, as well as the bill's sponsor, the hon. member for South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, for their interventions and the hon. member for Kitchener—Conestoga for his comments.

● (1215)

[Translation]

The hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh pointed out in his remarks that the purpose of Bill C-317 is to require that labour organizations provide specific financial information to the minister for public disclosure. The member also pointed out that failure of a labour organization to comply with this new requirement could result in a labour organization losing its tax exempt status, noting, as well, the subsequent impact this would have on dues-paying members of that organization.

[English]

He characterized the effect of Bill C-317 in the *Debates*, on October 18, 2011, page 2171, as follows:

—the income tax exemptions that apply to labour organizations and the reduction of taxable income as a result of writing off the dues paid by their members would easily qualify as alleviations of taxation. Further, the provisions of Bill C-317 would repeal those alleviations by terminating the labour organization's Income Tax Act exempt status.

[Translation]

The member for Windsor—Tecumseh explained that any labour organization not in compliance with the financial disclosure requirements outlined in the bill would no longer enjoy the tax exempt status as provided for in section 149(1)(k) of the Income tax Act. He argued that this would have the effect of taxing a person, or in this case an organization, that was not already a taxpayer. He concluded therefore that Bill C-317 should have been preceded by the adoption of a ways and means motion.

[English]

In his submission, the hon. member for South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale in the *Debates*, on October 25, 2011, page 2438, contended that the purpose of Bill C-317 was limited simply to providing a mechanism for the public disclosure of union finances and only augmented the existing types of information that the Canada Revenue Agency was already empowered by its mandate to compel organizations or taxpayers to provide.

He also referred to a ruling from the 40th Parliament on Bill C-470, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (revocation of registration). He found a parallel between Bill C-317 and Bill C-470. Where it had been argued that charitable donations were discretionary so that Bill C-470 did not affect any existing alleviation of tax, the hon. member argued that in the case of Bill C-317 payers of union dues could exercise their discretion by opting to join a union or labour organization that adhered to the financial disclosure provisions of Bill C-317 and, thus, maintain the tax exempt status of their dues.

[Translation]

Before analyzing the arguments presented, it is important to take into consideration the context of this discussion as it is worth noting that the financial procedures of the House are based on long-established and strictly observed rules of procedure, procedures that are based on the concept of the financial initiative of the Crown. This concept is clearly presented in Erskine May's *Parliamentary Practice*, 23rd edition, at page 848:

[English]

—it is for the Commons, acting on the sole initiative of Ministers, first to authorize the relevant expenditure (or 'Supply') and, second, to provide through taxes and other sources of public revenue the 'Ways and Means' deemed necessary to meet the Supply so granted.

The role of the Speaker in the present situation is to determine if Bill C-317 is a legislative initiative which imposes a tax or other charge on the taxpayer and therefore would have required the prior adoption of a ways and means motion by the House.

[Translation]

In order to respond to that question, it may be useful to examine more closely the different precedents cited by the members who intervened on the present case.

[English]

During his initial point of order, the member for Windsor—Tecumseh referred the Chair to the ruling of November 28, 2007, on Bill C-418, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (deductibility of remuneration). In that ruling, at pages 1463 and 1464 of the *Debates*, the Chair made reference to Erskine May's *Parliamentary Practice*,

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23rd edition at page 896, where it explains, "the repeal or reduction of existing alleviations of taxation" must be preceded by a ways and means motion.

The Chair concluded that Bill C-418 removed an existing tax exemption which then resulted in an increase in the tax payable by certain corporations. In the Chair's view, this constituted a reduction of an alleviation of taxation and therefore required that it be preceded by a ways and means motion. I would ask hon. members to retain the phrase, "alleviation of taxation", as I will return to that concept shortly.

• (1220)

[Translation]

First, let me address the differing interpretations of how an individual union member's rights are affected by Bill C-317. The member for Windsor—Tecumseh argued that union members do not have the automatic individual right to stop paying dues to an organization that no longer enjoys a tax exempt status. The member for South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale countered that, in his estimation, union members would have the ability to select a labour organization that complies with the provisions of C-317 to ensure that they maintain their tax exemption. While this is more a question of labour law than procedure, the Chair is aware that members of a labour organization cannot easily change which union they belong to nor can they simply withhold paying their union dues except in extremely limited situations provided for in the law. As pointed out by the member for Windsor—Tecumseh, this is in stark contrast to donors to a charity who may choose whether they wish to contribute, the organization they wish to contribute to and the timing of any such contribution.

[English]

The Chair must agree with the hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh that the non-compliance of the labour organization would also remove a current income tax deduction for the dues-paying members of the union. For the Chair, there can be no doubt that this also can be characterized as the removal of an existing alleviation. For this reason alone, Bill C-317 would need to be preceded by a ways and means motion.

[Translation]

Let us return to the larger context. The Chair appreciates the point made by the member for South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale that the Canada Revenue Agency already enjoys the authority to compel the financial disclosure of certain financial information. However, it is not the power of the CRA to require the disclosure of certain information that is at issue.

*Points of Order**[English]*

It is true, as the member for South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale claims, that Bill C-317 changes the reporting requirements for labour organizations. However, contrary to what the member asserted, that is not all it does. In stating that non-compliance with these new requirements makes a labour organization ineligible for tax deductions available to labour organizations, Bill C-317 potentially removes an alleviation of taxation and in so doing, the bill potentially creates a new statutory authority that removes what is currently an unqualified exemption.

Perhaps the distinction can be better understood by looking again at the example offered by Bill C-470 in the third session of the 40th Parliament. That bill changed the definition of a class of taxpayers, specifically registered charities, but the alleviation of tax for registered charities as a class of taxpayer remained unchanged. By contrast, Bill C-317 does not change the definition of a labour organization. It demands disclosure of certain types of information, failing which disclosure, the bill provides that the tax alleviation in place for labour organizations will no longer apply to non-complying labour organizations.

This is a subtle difference, but it is a crucial distinction for the Chair.

[Translation]

The ruling on Bill C-470 determined that the bill altered the conditions and requirements for an organization to be classified by the minister as a registered charity but did not alter the class of taxpayer. In more basic terms, Bill C-470 proposed to alter the definition of what constituted a registered charity but did not change the tax exemptions for registered charities. In the ruling on C-470, delivered on March 15, 2010, and found on pages 419 and 420 of the *Debates*, I stated:

It seems to me that the bill instead seeks to provide a new criterion that would allow the minister to determine into which existing class of taxpayer an organization falls. The existing tax regimes and the existing tax rates are not affected.

[English]

However, unlike Bill C-470, Bill C-317 does not attempt to alter the conditions or requirements for an organization to be classified as a labour organization.

According to the provisions of Bill C-317, under the Income Tax Act, a labour organization would remain a labour organization, whether it complied with the proposed disclosure requirements or not. If enacted, Bill C-317 would thus create a situation whereby labour organizations can be differentiated into two distinct categories, those that comply with the financial reporting mechanism and those that do not.

In the Chair's opinion, this new category of labour organization would constitute a class of taxpayer that does not currently exist. Labour organizations in the newly created class, that is those that do not meet the financial reporting requirements outlined in the bill, would see the removal of their current tax-exempt status. Put simply, Bill C-470 did not alter the tax-exempt status of registered charities, whereas, in contrast, Bill C-317 proposes to alter the current tax-exempt status of labour organizations.

As a result of this determination, I find that Bill C-317, by distinguishing between certain labour organizations, creates a new class of taxpayer and that this new class of taxpayer would then be subject to a removal of an alleviation of taxation.

For the reasons stated, I must, therefore, rule that Bill C-317 should have been preceded by a ways and means motion. Consequently, I also rule that all proceedings on the bill to date, namely introduction and first reading, have not respected the provisions of our Standing Orders and are, therefore, null and void. Accordingly, the Chair directs that the order for second reading of the bill be discharged and the bill be withdrawn from the order paper.

● (1225)

[Translation]

However, I am reluctant to deny the member what is likely his only opportunity in this Parliament to have an item on the order of precedence.

[English]

As members are well aware, Standing Order 94(1) provides the Speaker with the authority to “make all arrangements necessary to ensure the orderly conduct of Private Members' Business”.

In light of the unique nature of this particular situation, the member for South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale will be permitted to substitute another item onto the order of precedence. The substitution shall be done pursuant to the spirit of Standing Order 92.1, which allows a member 20 sitting days to substitute another item of private members' business for the item that has been discharged and withdrawn. Should the member choose not to replace the item within the next 20 sitting days, his name will then be dropped from the order paper.

[Translation]

I thank the House for its attention.

[English]

ORAL QUESTIONS

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, something happened in the House at the end of question period, which is really serious with regard to the state of our democracy. A public servant just quit over what he felt was principle when the President of the Treasury Board asked to have tabled in the House the fact that he had given a donation to a political party. It happened to be our party but it could have been any party.

That goes against everything that we stand for in this democracy. It is fear and intimidation. It can put the chill of fear into public servants and individuals in Canada donating to a political party that a minister will use that against them. By implication, it can be damaging to a person's reputation. In my view, it goes against freedom of choice, freedom of speech and freedom of political affiliation. The government has access to information on Canadians all over the place, whether it is their tax matters, health matters or whatever it may be. This is unbecoming of a minister to do. I do not have a clue what rule to apply here but I think what that minister has done is wrong.

We know that during the election the Conservatives used Facebook and Twitter to prevent people from coming to certain meetings. This is the kind of stuff that we would expect to see in Russia where people are spying on others and where fear and intimidation are used to prevent people from doing certain things.

I think what the President of the Treasury Board did in the House, by naming a person's individual political affiliation to try to make a point and destroy his reputation, because he resigned on principle, is absolutely and utterly wrong in this country called Canada.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the information that was provided is public information. One can go to a website and find information on all donations. One can find that I actually donated to the Conservative Party. I will publicly admit this.

We are not talking about any confidential government information. It is publicly available information. I see no problem or offence committed in giving out publicly available information.

● (1230)

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I rise on the same point of order. What happened after question period is shameful, especially since it came from the President of the Treasury Board. Frankly, that individual is in no position to lecture anyone, considering everything that is going on and the money he used to line the pockets of his friends in his riding during the G20 and G8 summits. What is even more shameful is that they are attacking a public servant, someone who worked for the well-being of the community for 30 years.

Fortunately, nothing in our democracy prohibits someone from donating any sum of money to a political party, in accordance with the Canada Elections Act, even if that person is a public servant or senior official. Ever since this government came to power, it has created a climate of fear. I began working as a member's assistant in 1993 and, until the Conservatives came to power, never, ever did any public servants tell me that they could not answer, that they did not know anything, that they might call me back and that it would be better to go through political channels rather than through the public service. This began precisely when the Conservatives came to power. This government suddenly created a climate of fear and began scaring public servants. It is trying to prevent them from doing their jobs. What this government is doing publicly today is unfortunately more of the same.

[English]

The Speaker: I have already heard from the member for Winnipeg North just before we went into routine proceedings. If he has something new to add, I will hear him now very briefly.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government representative stood up and indicated that he, too, has contributed to the Conservative Party.

What he is really doing is trying to minimize the severity of what actually took place after question period. Although I do not know him personally, there is a 30-plus year career civil servant who has taken a stand on a very important issue that all Canadians are concerned about.

Government Orders

The government has sent out a message to the civil service. This is where it starts to get on to our privileges as members of Parliament. We rely, in part, on civil servants being able to provide information, whether it is in committee or elsewhere, freely. The government message here is that if they say or do or take any actions against the government, it will come down with a heavy arm.

In this case, it was meant to intimidate and discredit the actions of that particular career civil servant. I believe the government, at the very least, owes the civil servant a formal apology. In fact, I would suggest that it is an issue that you, Mr. Speaker, should take under advisement and come back to this House in terms of the ramifications of the point of order that was raised by the President of the Treasury Board.

I take it very seriously. The government is trying to silence—

The Speaker: I will just stop the hon. member there so that we do not get into a whole debate on a point of order.

I will hear the hon. Chief Government Whip and then I will take it under advisement and come back to the House if necessary.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, as I said previously, the information provided is publicly available. The President of the Treasury Board did not provide any confidential information. He did not provide anything with respect to that individual.

However, I find it interesting that the report of the individual's retirement first came from the Liberal Party.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

SECURITY OF TENURE OF MILITARY JUDGES ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-16, An Act to amend the National Defence Act (military judges), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in keeping with my own injunction to try to be brief, I will offer a few brief remarks with respect to this bill. It is, after all, a two-page bill. It is not earth-shattering.

First, since I will not be on my feet here at any other time before November 11, I want to take this opportunity to recognize the brave men and women who serve us so well. We are very fortunate in this country that we have people who are prepared to put their lives, bodies and minds on the line for us.

I want to make the point that some parties in particular take every opportunity to enthusiastically embrace the military; however, there seems to be a somewhat less enthusiastic embrace for our veterans. On November 11, I hope that our embrace is far more enthusiastic and that they get a level of support similar to what our military gets.

I offer my condolences to the Greff family and to the Gilbert family. This must be a particularly poignant time for them. Both families are hurting and are classic examples of people who give their lives so that we can operate in this chamber as we do.

Government Orders

Bill C-16 has had a tortured path getting here. It went through a number of reiterations, prorogations and dissolutions and was derailed in various other ways as well. We saw another example this morning, when some members of House, rightly upset that they could not offer their observations with respect to Remembrance Day, denied unanimous consent to proceed in an expedited fashion. As a consequence, we have taken far longer than we ever should have in order to deal with the bill.

The bill has three components and revolves around a core concept: the tension between the independence of the judiciary and the hierarchy of the military command structure. Indeed, pretty well all of the justice issues in the military, the conflicts over those two points of principle, are the subject matter of both Bill C-16 and Bill C-15. Sometimes it is with respect to the independence of the police, but in the case of Bill C-16, it is with respect to the independence of the judiciary.

We are here because the courts have told us that the system has to be repaired. We cannot have a system in which the independence of the judiciary is subject to the whims of the CDS or anyone else in the chain of command. The bill does respond to the *Regina v. Leblanc* case and it requires a retirement age of 60.

I appreciate that in order to be a military judge, one also has to be a military officer, but it is an interesting conflict. Frankly, for lawyers and judges the age of 60 is frequently prime time in their careers. Ironically, by requiring that age of retirement and by requiring that the judge be an officer, in effect we are limiting the pool of people who would, in all other circumstances, be excellently qualified for the judiciary.

As a classic example, last week we had a hearing with respect to two judges for the Supreme Court of Canada. One was 63 and the other was 56 years old. Ironically, one would not be qualified to be a military judge and the other would only be entitled to one appointment.

• (1235)

There is an interesting debate as to whether one has to be an officer in order to be a military judge. I am not sure that we should not actually be debating that a little more extensively; possibly a retired officer could be a military judge beyond age 60. There is another argument as to why one has to achieve the fitness levels required of officers up to age 60 in order to sit as a judicial officer.

Those issues aside, this bill does warrant our support. I think the regime that the government has put forward in the bill is an appropriate regime. A military officer who is a military judge will be automatically required to retire at age 60, as opposed to the requirement in the civilian system for retirement at age 75. The person can be removed for cause, and there is an inquiry process, again independent of the chain of command. That is an appropriate form of removal, given our requirements for the independence of the judiciary. Of course, there is also resignation.

There is this ongoing tension between chain of command and the independence of the judiciary. Bill C-16 does achieve some balance between those two tensions, and I and my party will support this bill; indeed, we would have supported it at all stages had the government handled the desires of other people in this chamber a little more

sensitively. In fact, possibly by this time we would have gone to committee of the whole and had this bill passed and on the way to the Senate. There is a time deadline of December 2, and I am rather hoping that we still achieve that time deadline; otherwise, a decision will be imposed upon us.

• (1240)

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the hon. member who just spoke. I would like to tell him that we also support this bill.

However, when I returned to my office, I heard criticism from a Conservative member. First, you clearly established the rules here in this House by saying that he did not have the right to mention the absence or presence of a member. One thing is for certain: while I was away, I was still watching the House of Commons debates on television and I heard this same member criticizing the Bloc Québécois for taking steps to delay the bill—a bill that we support—which is completely false. I would like to ask the hon. member whether he shares my opinion in this regard.

This bill was introduced on October 7. The House resumed on September 19. It is the Conservative government that is in charge of the legislative agenda here in the House. Subsequent to the court's decision, the Conservatives could very well have introduced this bill earlier and made sure, of course, that the whole process was followed and that this bill was passed quickly. Everything could have been done but, instead, the Conservatives introduced a bill to abolish the Canadian Wheat Board and a bill to reduce the political weight of Quebec. They introduced all kinds of bills but not this one. So if anyone is to blame for the speed with which the bill must be passed, it is the Conservatives themselves.

[English]

Hon. John McKay: I am not sure that was a question Mr. Speaker, but it was a comment.

I largely agree with the sentiments of the hon. member. The bill was initially presented in a form that incorporated a number of other things, many of which were quite problematic. It could have actually been presented as a stand-alone bill in the last Parliament and could have been law by now.

The government chooses to proceed in whatever way it chooses. It prorogues at its whim, it formulates its bills at its whim, and it alienates members of the opposition, apparently, at will as well, the consequence being that things that should not be delayed do get delayed.

I say to my colleagues on the government side that what goes around comes around.

[Translation]

Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out that it is a bit rich for the hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska to say he supports this bill when he and his colleagues were the ones who refused to give unanimous consent this morning.

[English]

The hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood made the point that what goes around comes around. Earlier, the member for St. John's East suggested that the measures in these bills could have been brought forward in the previous Parliament.

The statement made by the member for Scarborough—Guildwood is true. The statement by the member for St. John's East is not true, given that the bill containing these measures in the last Parliament was reported from committee on March 24 of this year and this country was thrown into an unnecessary and costly election on March 25.

Would the member not agree that what goes around does come around, but in this case his party and the other parties opposite prevented us from moving forward with the subsequent stages of these measures?

• (1245)

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, that is the kind of debate I would actually wish to avoid by limiting my remarks simply to the substance of the bill, but since the Conservatives insist on getting into it, we are going to get into it, are we not? The clock is going to run, and again we are going to achieve absolutely nothing.

This legislation has had at least three or four iterations. It is almost what one might call a fifth generation bill. During that period of time we have had prorogations and all kinds of delays. The government can move its legislation as it desires, so to say that it did not quite get it done in the bill's last iteration before an election is also pretty rich.

This is, frankly and candidly, an unnecessary debate; we agree on the substance of the bill, so let us just move it forward. As the parliamentary secretary said earlier, only four judges are involved. That is all we are talking about here. If the government cannot move its legislation and continues to alienate the opposition, we are not going to make the December 2 deadline, in which case the whole system will go up the flue.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to participate in the debate on Bill C-16. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence is well aware that the Bloc Québécois supports this bill.

What we take issue with is that the parliamentary secretary has said in the House that we have failed to provide unanimous consent, which is completely false. I will give an example. Today, I gave unanimous consent, on behalf of the Bloc Québécois which I represent, to the agreement between the Cree and the federal government. We had already given our word and consent with respect to this bill.

With regard to Bill C-16, we were asked for our support yesterday at the same time that we were asking for unanimous consent to pay tribute to veterans. Remembrance Day is at hand. We are all wearing poppies—I see, Mr. Speaker, that you are wearing one also—to commemorate the battles fought by our veterans, the people who went overseas to fight in two world wars and other conflicts, which unfortunately should not have occurred but did, and who fought for our freedom.

Government Orders

The dean of the House of Commons, the member for Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, wanted to rise, like members of other parties, and pay tribute for a few minutes to the people who fought to protect our freedom and to prevent dictators from taking control of the world and suppressing freedoms, as was recently the case in Libya. The leader of the Green Party also wanted a few minutes to address the people and pay tribute to our veterans. This was refused by lack of unanimous consent. We were simply told that the Conservative government had the right to do so and that it was within the rules.

I know that the government was probably afraid that the Green Party and the Bloc Québécois would use this precedent to intervene and rise often in the House, saying that they want to be recognized as parties. We have known from the beginning that we do not have 12 members, just 4, and that the leader of the Green Party is the only member of Parliament for her party. For that reason, the interim leader of the Bloc Québécois specifically stated yesterday, when making the request, that he did not want to set a precedent and that he simply wanted to make a statement.

That was one of the lowest moments I have experienced since being elected in 2004. I have rarely seen a government rebuff the opposition parties in a such a way and on such an occasion.

We did not give our unanimous consent to Bill C-16 then and we are opposing it today because the fault lies with the government for not being alert enough to introduce it sooner. The government could have introduced this bill as early as September 19, when Parliament resumed, but it waited until October 7. The government has also introduced a series of bills and has prevented the opposition from debating them and discussing them properly by moving closure and time allocation motions five or six times. I do not even know how many there have been, but closure has been moved on at least five or six bills. We cannot follow the normal legislative process because the government is in a very big hurry. It made legislative choices, but Bill 16, which we are discussing today, was not part of them.

The Conservatives chose to introduce Bill C-10 on justice. They decided to abolish the firearms registry and destroy the data. They also introduced a bill that will diminish Quebec's political weight in the House. There was also the bill on the Canadian Wheat Board. They chose to introduce all those bills instead of Bill C-16. I want to come back to Bill C-16 to which we could have given our unanimous consent. We only did what the government said it would do, in other words, follow the rules. I have been in federal politics long enough to know there are rules to be followed in the House. There is a legislative process to be followed: first reading, second reading, third reading and work in committee.

I understand perfectly well that there was a court order, but if the government was in such a hurry, it could have made sure that this bill went through all the stages as quickly as possible. After all, it is the government that sets the agenda.

Government Orders

●(1250)

Yesterday, by refusing to allow us to pay tribute to veterans, if the government was trying to send a message that we do not exist, that we are not an official party and that we do not deserve to speak in this House, it failed. Today we are sending our own message that we are still here. Just like the Conservative members, and in fact like all members of the House, we were democratically elected. Even the Prime Minister himself must acknowledge that he was democratically elected in his riding and that he is an MP first and foremost, and Prime Minister second. I think it is our duty to do things correctly here.

Thus, there are no second-class MPs in this House. I never thought that when there were 50 Bloc Québécois MPs, nor do I think that today, just because we are fewer in number. My message to the government is that it should think carefully before acting as heinously as it did yesterday. Nevertheless, once again, it is the government's fault that it did not introduce the bill earlier. And we support Bill C-16, especially since a court decision will strengthen the independence of military judges. That is very important. The Minister of National Defence introduced Bill C-16, An Act to amend the National Defence Act (military judges), in the House of Commons at first reading.

The Court Martial Appeal Court of Canada delivered its judgment in the *Regina v. Leblanc* case. In its decision, the appeal court determined that the provisions in the National Defence Act and the Queen's Regulations and Orders for the Canadian Forces regarding the appointment and retirement of military judges do not sufficiently respect judicial independence as required by section 11(d) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

In declaring certain National Defence Act provisions constitutionally invalid and inoperative, the Court Martial Appeal Court in *Regina v. Leblanc* suspended the declaration of invalidity for a period of six months to allow remedial legislation to be enacted. The declaration will be effective December 2, 2011.

Bill C-16 amends the provisions of the National Defence Act that deal with the tenure of military judges, providing that they serve until the retirement age of 60 years, unless removed for cause on the recommendation of an inquiry committee or upon the resignation of the military judge.

To give a bit of background and explain the situation in full, I should mention that judges used to be appointed for a predetermined period of time. I believe it was for five years, but when a judge's term was up for renewal, it seemed that he or she did not have complete independence at that time. Now the process will simply be the same as it is for other judges. The tenure for military judges will allow them to sit as such until the retirement age of 60 years. That creates a balance. It sends a message that we will improve the situation around judicial independence, which is something we in the House could in no way be opposed to.

Justice Lamer made a number of recommendations, and this is one that we have agreed with from the outset. The Bloc Québécois believes in keeping military justice separate from civilian justice. It makes sense for the Canadian armed forces to have its own justice system, in light of the particularities of military life and military

requirements. This bill corrects a situation that created a fairly significant difference between the civilian justice system and the military justice system, in order to improve the military system.

It is absolutely necessary to have discipline within an army. Without that discipline, we would lose any sense of structure and effectiveness. Since the primary goal of our armed forces is to protect the safety of Canadians, this issue is vitally important. The Supreme Court of Canada recognized this principle in 1992:

The purpose of a separate system of military tribunals is to allow the Armed Forces to deal with matters that pertain directly to the discipline, efficiency and morale of the military. The safety and well-being of Canadians depends considerably on the willingness and readiness of a force of men and women to defend against threats to the nation's security. To maintain the Armed Forces in a state of readiness, the military must be in a position to enforce internal discipline effectively and efficiently. Breaches of military discipline must be dealt with speedily and, frequently, punished more severely than would be the case if a civilian engaged in such conduct. As a result, the military has its own Code of Service Discipline to allow it to meet its particular disciplinary needs. In addition, special service tribunals, rather than the ordinary courts, have been given jurisdiction to punish breaches of the Code of Service Discipline. Recourse to the ordinary criminal courts would, as a general rule, be inadequate to serve the particular disciplinary needs of the military.

●(1255)

A number of changes were called for. I think that Bill C-16 is a step that, I repeat, addresses only one of Justice Lamer's recommendations. We can go step by step. That is no problem.

There are also offences in the Code of Service Discipline that do not have equivalents in civilian justice. For example, the offences of disobedience of lawful command or disobedience to a superior officer do not exist in civilian justice. Military justice applies to three categories of people: military personnel in the regular forces, reservists and civilians who work with military personnel on missions.

But although military justice is necessary, people who join the Canadian Forces do not lose their rights, including their charter rights.

For 12 years, a great deal of thought has been given to modernizing military justice to bring it more in line with civilian justice. In its May 2009 report, the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs wrote the following, "...the military, as an organization, benefits when the rules that govern it largely reflect those that apply to Canadian society in general."

We therefore feel it is important that the government consider not only the issue of the independence of military judges but also the entire military justice reform. In my opinion, even the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence can understand that, when we talk about such a bill, it goes without saying that we should expand our discussion and thought process a bit to include the whole military justice policy, particularly since more than one recommendation was given by Justice Lamer and the Senate committee.

Military justice reform dates back to 1997 and stems from two reviews. First, a special advisory group received a mandate to study the Code of Service Discipline set out in the National Defence Act. Then, the commission of inquiry into the deployment of Canadian forces to Somalia was asked to review how to handle the actions of certain soldiers sent to that country.

The two resulting reports led the government to introduce Bill C-25, which came into effect on September 1, 1999. This bill amended the National Defence Act by abolishing the death penalty in the military justice system, a very important change; incorporating civilian parole ineligibility provisions; creating the Canadian Forces Grievance Board; creating the Military Police Complaints Commission; strengthening the independence of military judges by making changes to the terms of their appointment, their qualifications and their tenure; and creating new positions within the military justice system in order to separate the investigative function from the prosecution and defence functions.

Clause 96 of Bill C-25 provided for an independent review every five years in order to examine the amendments to the National Defence Act. Many of the amendments I just listed are still pending. I am counting on the current government and its Minister of National Defence to take into account the majority of the recommendations that I mentioned just a few moments ago.

With this in mind, the federal government appointed a former Supreme Court justice, Antonio Lamer, to conduct the first review. He presented his report to Parliament in March 2003. Military justice has been on the radar for some time now, and here today we have this bill—barely two pages long—regarding the independence of judges. There will undoubtedly be other, more significant, changes that will improve the National Defence Act and that will also implement Justice Lamer's recommendations, which, as I have said before, are already 10 years old.

In his report, Justice Lamer observed that “Canada's military justice system generally works very well, subject to a few changes.” Consequently, he made 88 recommendations to improve military justice. I will not list the 88 recommendations, although some here might like me to do so.

● (1300)

I will briefly refer to some of Justice Lamer's 2003 recommendations: arrest procedures and pre-trial detention; procedures for proceeding by indictment; the structure of the court; sentencing; aligning the rights of the accused with those in a civil court such that the accused could choose the type of court martial and such that the finding of court martial panels would be arrived at by unanimous vote; strengthening the independence of the principal intervenors in the military justice system; and improving the grievance and military police complaints processes.

In order to implement Justice Lamer's recommendations and amend the National Defence Act, the government introduced Bill C-45 in August 2006. It died on the order paper. In March 2008, the government introduced another bill, Bill C-7, which was identical to Bill C-45 and also died on the order paper when an election was called in the fall of 2008.

Government Orders

In April 2008, the Court Martial Appeal Court of Canada handed down a decision in the case of Regina v. Trépanier. At issue was the possibility of choosing the type of court martial. The Court Martial Appeal Court of Canada ruled that a provision of the National Defence Act that gave the court martial administrator exclusive authority to select the type of court martial was unconstitutional. The Court Martial Appeal Court of Canada found that it was unacceptable that the accused could not choose the kind of court martial that would judge him or her.

Following that ruling—which brings us to where we are today—the federal government introduced Bill C-60 to accomplish the following: to more closely align the manner in which the mode of trial by courts martial is determined with the approach in the civilian criminal justice system, while still satisfying the unique needs of the military justice system; to reduce the types of courts martial from four to two; to allow military judges to deal with certain pre-trial matters at any time after a charge has been preferred; and to require court martial panels to make key decisions on the basis of a unanimous vote. Bill C-60 passed in the House on June 18, 2008.

One of Justice Lamer's recommendations has been incorporated into Bill C-16 before us today.

I repeat—and I will conclude on this in just a moment—the Bloc Québécois is not opposed to Bill C-16. The Bloc did not break any agreements to speed things up. The government alone is responsible for its own legislative agenda. It could have introduced the bill to get it through all the various steps in the usual way, knowing very well that a court order meant that a certain timeline had to be respected.

I cannot believe that, with the army of people and public servants available to the Minister of National Defence, it did not occur to him to look at a calendar and ensure that all the steps could be completed regarding Bill C-16. It is because of the government's own negligence that it is so keen to have the bill fast-tracked, because it did not do its homework.

I cannot believe that the government behaved in this manner. However, as I explained at the beginning of my speech, it is simply because the government made other choices. It had other priorities. It wanted to reduce Quebec's political weight with Bill C-20, for instance. It wanted to put the Canadian Wheat Board out of commission. It also decided to rule out all potential debate on Bill C-10 regarding justice. I can assure this House, not everyone is pleased about that. It is no longer only Quebec that opposes that bill. We will soon be up to 10 provinces that oppose the bill. But the government decided to make it a priority anyway.

In closing, it should have found a way to move a little faster on this matter and introduce Bill C-16 earlier. Had it done so, we might not still be talking about it today.

● (1305)

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Is the House ready for the question?

Government Orders

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I declare the motion carried. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on National Defence.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

* * *

[Translation]

STRENGTHENING MILITARY JUSTICE IN THE DEFENCE OF CANADA ACT

Hon. Diane Ablonczy (for the Minister of National Defence) moved that Bill C-15, An Act to amend the National Defence Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to remind the House that, although Bill C-16 was sent to committee, we could have moved forward much more quickly if the member for Richmond—Arthabaska had acted differently this morning. It is not up to him to decide who forced the Standing Committee on National Defence to examine these very urgent measures for the second time, something that is unnecessary. I think that all members in this House understand these measures and understand how this member wasted the time of the House and the Standing Committee on National Defence.

[English]

As I begin my remarks, I would like to congratulate those of our colleagues, the hon. member for St. John's East, the hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood, and the hon. member for Hamilton Centre, who worked very hard with members on our side to develop a common approach.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, I do not plan on making a habit of interrupting the parliamentary secretary. However, I must correct one thing: not one of the 308 members in this House is wasting anyone's time. Every member has the right to speak and to give their opinion. Obviously, some members are not happy with some decisions, for various reasons. Yesterday there was a decision that went against us and that we strongly disagreed with. We will get over it, and the parliamentary secretary should too and should not say that a member of the House is wasting the House's time.

● (1310)

Mr. Chris Alexander: Mr. Speaker, the member for Richmond—Arthabaska knows full well that he has drawn out the procedures and the debate on this issue. It had nothing to do with the substance of these matters, which are urgent for all members of the Canadian Armed Forces. We are ashamed for him. Even if—

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. Is the parliamentary secretary continuing with debate, or is he responding to the point of order?

Mr. Chris Alexander: Mr. Speaker, I am continuing debate, a debate that is urgent, on measures that have been before this House three times. This is the fourth time. It is important that members of this House understand the urgency of these measures and the level of consensus that has been reached by successive Parliaments on these measures. That is the reason for my remarks.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. The Chair appreciates the clarification and would be pleased if the hon. parliamentary secretary continued with his remarks regarding the matter before the House.

Mr. Chris Alexander: Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, we have had great collaboration from all three parties represented in this House.

I want to pay particular tribute to the three members I mentioned earlier. The member for St. John's East made a couple of remarks about the LeBlanc case which probably, if they were heard by members of the Canadian Forces, would have them regretting that he chose to pursue his legal career not in the judge advocate general's office but in civilian life. He clearly understands the importance of the system, the importance of a strong defence, the importance of independent judges and professionals at every level of the military justice system.

I thank the member for his clarity on the issues. I also thank his party and the Liberal Party for their constructive contribution to advancing these bills.

I rise now in support of Bill C-15, the strengthening military justice in the defence of Canada bill, which concerns an important aspect of national defence, that of military justice in the broad sense.

Maintaining the integrity of the military justice system is the responsibility of government and should concern all Canadians. The military justice system is an essential tool to maintain the discipline, morale and operational effectiveness of the Canadian Forces.

Without such a system, our men and women in uniform would not be able to focus on their number one priority which is to protect the interests of Canada and Canadians.

[Translation]

For that reason, the government, the Supreme Court of Canada and even the Constitution recognized the importance of maintaining a robust military justice system.

[English]

This government also recognizes, as did Chief Justice Lamer in his 2003 report, that there is room for improvement. The principles and procedures of military courts martial and summary trials must remain consistent with Canadian values and the evolution of Canadian criminal law. After all, a legal system can only remain strong if it evolves alongside the society it serves. Otherwise, an outdated system could risk undermining not only the legitimacy of military law, but also the health and vitality of the forces themselves.

This government has tried three times since 2006 to introduce the necessary legislation to do so, but each bill has failed to progress as a result of the unpredictable nature of a minority Parliament. I do not think it is worth going into the details again of those stories from previous Parliaments.

[Translation]

In 1998, when the National Defence Act was last updated, an independent review of the act every five years was made mandatory. In the first review, in 2003—the member for Richmond—Arthabaska was right to mention that it was some time ago—Chief Justice Lamer made several important recommendations about how to improve the act.

[English]

These recommendations focused on the administration of military justice, the role of the Canadian Forces provost marshal, the head of the military police, as well as the system by which grievances of Canadian Forces members were addressed. All of these recommendations were studied in detail, both inside and outside the Canadian Forces and Department of National Defence. A wide range of stakeholders, civilian, military, government, non-government were consulted and, as a result, this government brought forward legislation on two separate occasions to update the National Defence Act. Members know them well. They were Bill C-7 in 2006 and Bill C-45 in 2008, both of which, as we are aware, died on the order paper.

Then in 2008, the ruling of the Court Martial Appeal Court of Canada in the case of Regina v. Trépanier forced the government to introduce legislation on an urgent basis. In response, the government rapidly introduced a targeted bill, Bill C-60, to rectify this problem. Thanks to many hon. members still present, this legislation was passed by Parliament.

• (1315)

[Translation]

In 2010, the government once again tried to update the National Defence Act, this time by following up on recommendations from the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs as well as the latest recommendations from Chief Justice Lamer.

[English]

That bill, Bill C-41, was introduced during the final session of the 40th Parliament and was both studied and reported on by the Senate committee.

[Translation]

Some of the amendments that were submitted by the Bloc and discussed in committee were included in Bill C-41.

[English]

However, that bill died with the dissolution of Parliament in March. Since that time, we have had the Court Martial Appeal Court ruling, already discussed today, which assessed the process by which military judges were appointed, currently on a five-year basis, and we started to deal with that issue with Bill C-16. However, that bill does not address other important amendments included in Bill C-15, a bill that aims to reinforce military justice by bringing the National

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Defence Act up to date. This is an act that is evergreen, that requires constant updating, as many pieces of legislation do, on which the institutions of our country depend.

We have given careful consideration to the recommendations and proposed amendments put forward by members of the House, when Bill C-41 was studied in committee.

[Translation]

Bill C-15 would address various problems regarding military justice through a series of important amendments to the National Defence Act.

[English]

First, it would strengthen the administration of military justice by allowing for the appointment of part-time military judges to serve in times of large-scale operations and other search periods, thereby providing flexibility in the courts martial system. We hope this is not a provision that will be needed soon or often, but it needs to be there and it is a former chief justice of our country's Supreme Court who endorses that view.

In addition, it would lower the minimum rank requirement for the senior member of a court martial panel from colonel to lieutenant colonel in most cases and reduce the minimum rank of serving panel members on courts martial of non-commissioned members from warrant officer to sergeant. This fight simply widens the pool of those eligible to serve on these panels.

It would also allow for one more non-commissioned officer to serve on the panel when the accused is a non-commissioned member, as well as allow for increased participation of non-commissioned officers, without undermining the requirement for leadership and experience in the maintenance of discipline. It is the experience of non-commissioned members, as well as officers, on which this system depends.

[Translation]

This bill would clearly define the objectives, intent and principles of sentencing in the military justice system.

[English]

By articulating the purposes of military justice, we would be giving increased clarity and transparency to all those engaged in its delivery. This is perhaps the most exciting and compelling aspect of this bill. The National Defence Act had not previously articulated the purposes of military justice. They are implicit and known but now they would be explicit and this would provide Parliament's guidance to the military judges, officers and Court Martial Appeal Court justices presiding over courts martial, summary trials and appeals, just as Parliament has already done for the civilian criminal justice system in the Criminal Code. Of course, this guidance would expressly recognize the crucial elements unique to the military system necessary for it to fulfill its vital function.

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The bill would also introduce a broader range of sentencing options to help ensure that the punishments handed down by courts martial or summary trials are appropriate, both in terms of being appropriate to the offence committed as well as being broadly comparable to the range and type of sentences available within the civilian criminal justice system. Criminal justice evolves. Military justice must reflect the best of the evolution of the civilian criminal justice system.

[Translation]

Bill C-15 would also improve how victims are treated by the military justice system. The bill includes the option of presenting victim impact statements before courts martial and would give military judges the authority to order restitution.

• (1320)

[English]

Victim impact statements are very important to the whole justice system, something that is recognized on the civilian side but which now needs to be enacted on the military side for us to continue to be as proud of and confident in that system as we have been to date.

The bill would set an additional limitation period for holding summary trials, requiring that charges be laid within six months of an alleged offence being committed, to accompany the existing requirement that the summary trial be held within one year of the alleged offence. And, Bill C-15 would legally empower the Court Martial Appeal Court of Canada to suspend sentences handed down by courts martial where deemed appropriate.

[Translation]

In addition to resolving issues related to the administration of military justice, Bill C-15 would strengthen the military police system by officially establishing the position, duties and responsibilities of the Canadian Forces Provost Marshal, who is the military police chief, and by speeding up the military police complaint process and making it more fair.

[English]

The provost marshal, just to be clear, is not yet recognized officially in the National Defence Act. Mr. Justice Lamer recommended that he or she be so, and the position would be so under Bill C-15 when it is enacted.

With respect to addressing grievances in the Canadian Forces, Bill C-15 would permit the Chief of the Defence Staff to better delegate his power as the system's final grievance authority, thereby helping to resolve grievances more swiftly and efficiently in the interests of better administration and morale.

The bill would also formally change the name of the Canadian Forces Grievance Board, at its own request, to the military grievances external review committee to reflect the actual status of that committee. This would better reflect its independence and increase the confidence of Canadian Forces members in its impartiality.

Finally, this bill would improve the existing statutory requirement for a periodic independent review of selected provisions of the National Defence Act. It would clearly establish that requirement in

the act itself, setting out both the scope of review and the mandate of review period which would be adjusted from five to seven years to ensure the quality and effectiveness of each independent review.

[Translation]

In conclusion, the government recognizes that the changes proposed in this bill are extensive and, in some cases, complex. However, it should be noted that, in most cases, the need for these changes has been recognized for years and most of the proposed changes have already been addressed and analyzed in committee.

[English]

Our men and women in uniform are counting on us. This government acknowledges that regular attention and review is necessary to ensure the continued relevance and effectiveness of any legal system, military or civilian, and through Bill C-15, we will ensure that this is the case for military justice in the years to come.

Canadians depend on their government to build and maintain a justice system that reflects our national values and respects the rule of law. This government has been given a strong mandate from Canadians to do that. The House has a mandate to act in this area as well. I therefore call on the House to support this important effort by moving this bill forward as quickly as possible.

It may seem to some of us in the House that the measures in the bill are distant or obscure. Not all of us have had direct contact with the military justice system, but we all understand that the roughly 100,000 Canadian men and women in uniform, regular force, reserve force, depend on these measures for their morale, for their discipline, for the framework of justice, action and order in which they operate in Canada, and which they take with them abroad when they are deployed as they have been so often in the history of this country.

We have a responsibility to them, eight years after the Lamer report, to move forward with these important measures. The measures in Bill C-15 go well beyond those provided for in Bill C-16, and will indeed supersede that of the bill we dealt with earlier today if that bill passes into law earlier.

We hope that we have the support of all members of the House in moving through an expeditious debate on the bill, efficient consideration at committee, and early implementation and enactment of the bill into law.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the remarks from the hon. parliamentary secretary. My question involves the review that was done by the hon. Mr. Justice Lamer submitted in 2003. That review contained some 88 recommendations, a few of which are covered in Bill C-16 and some in Bill C-15, but it seems the government has substituted its judgment for Mr. Justice Lamer in omitting some of those.

As well, in his report there were many things in the recommendations the government could do without legislation, including increasing resources to the military justice system which apparently the government has failed to do in that intervening time period.

Why have there been these omissions of recommendations from the bill and why has the government not acted on those recommendations which do not require legislation?

● (1325)

Mr. Chris Alexander: Mr. Speaker, the government has acted on many of the recommendations that do not require legislation and we would be happy to review those in detail with the hon. member and his party at committee or outside of the House. Within the confines of an answer to this question, I cannot provide that level of detail.

The vast majority of the recommendations contained in the Lamer report of 2003 have been translated into legislation in the bill. I think the member will agree, as many members in his party did in consideration at committee, that these are the right ones and that not all were appropriate for translation for inclusion in the bill at this time.

There are larger issues related to the Military Police Complaints Commission and the grievance process which are still subject to policy review, still subject to decisions pending outside of the House, which we hope to translate into legislation at a subsequent date. But keep in mind that Justice LeSage is leading another review of the military justice system, which is due very soon, which will have recommendations. The House will have a chance to return to these issues relatively soon because of our delay in implementing the recommendations from the Lamer report over eight long years.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member would know, in the many reiterations of this bill, one of the debates was around the independence of the police to conduct investigations. The independence of the police is as important to the rule of law as the independence of the judiciary.

As I said earlier, the tension between the independence of the police and the command structure of the military is what creates something of a hybrid system for military justice in this country, and for that matter, in all other countries.

There exists a tension in the military system of justice that does not exist in the civilian system. Where police would be assumed to be, both factually and in appearance, independent of supervision from, say, an authority like a mayor or other political authority in a military justice system, that is not entirely a warranted assumption.

Hence, my question is with respect to subsection 18.5(3), which states: "The Vice Chief of the Defence Staff may issue instructions or guidelines in writing in respect of a particular investigation".

I would be interested in the government's view with respect to the ability of the vice chief of the defence staff to actually issue instructions on a unique and discreet investigation. That does not

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auger well for the independence of the police to pursue an investigation, where it might take the police.

Does the hon. member have some concern that this particular section could be both used, but more ominously abused, by senior brass, for want of a better term, in order to shut down an investigation?

Mr. Chris Alexander: Mr. Speaker, the government, after long consideration within the Department of National Defence, and on the basis of consultations with many, inside and outside of government, has come to the conclusion that it can be confident that those measures, mentioned by the member for Scarborough—Guildwood, are required. Abuse can come in many forms. We rely on the professionalism of the senior leadership of the Department of National Defence, and all our public servants, to prevent it. By and large they do.

I would remind the hon. member, there are also safeguards in the bill. The number of times that the vice chief of the defence staff has recourse to this provision is subject to review. This provision itself is subject to review, as are all the measures governing military justice. It is currently every five years. We are now proposing every seven years.

Let us be clear, there are institutions within the Department of National Defence. The superintendence of military justice is in the hands of the judge advocate general's office. Investigations and police work are in the hands of the provost marshal. They have their own logic and their own autonomy. That is enhanced by the bill, given that the provost marshals will for the first time be recognized, and the purposes of those officials' work recognized in the National Defence Act, thereby strengthening their ability to do their job without interference.

● (1330)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Given that the time for government orders for today is about to expire, the hon. parliamentary secretary will have four minutes remaining in questions and comments when the House returns to this bill.

In view of the ruling made earlier today, there will be no private member's business hour today.

Accordingly the House stands adjourned until Monday, November 14, 2011 at 11 a.m. pursuant to Standing Orders 28(2) and 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 1:31 p.m.)

APPENDIX

**ALPHABETICAL LIST OF MEMBERS WITH THEIR
CONSTITUENCIES, PROVINCE OF CONSTITUENCY
AND POLITICAL AFFILIATIONS;
COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE,
THE MINISTRY AND PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY**

CHAIR OCCUPANTS

The Speaker

HON. ANDREW SCHEER

The Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees of the Whole

MS. DENISE SAVOIE

The Deputy Chair of Committees of the Whole

MR. BARRY DEVOLIN

The Assistant Deputy Chair of Committees of the Whole

MR. BRUCE STANTON

BOARD OF INTERNAL ECONOMY

HON. ANDREW SCHEER

MS. CHRIS CHARLTON

MR. JOE COMARTIN

MS. JUDY FOOTE

HON. ROB MERRIFIELD

HON. GORDON O'CONNOR

HON. PETER VAN LOAN

ALPHABETICAL LIST OF MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

First Session—Forty-first Parliament

Name of Member	Constituency	Province of Constituency	Political Affiliation
Ablonczy, Hon. Diane, Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas and Consular Affairs).....	Calgary—Nose Hill	Alberta	CPC
Adams, Eve, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs	Mississauga—Brampton South	Ontario	CPC
Adler, Mark	York Centre	Ontario	CPC
Aglukkaq, Hon. Leona, Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency	Nunavut	Nunavut	CPC
Albas, Dan	Okanagan—Coquihalla	British Columbia	CPC
Albrecht, Harold	Kitchener—Conestoga	Ontario	CPC
Alexander, Chris, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence	Ajax—Pickering	Ontario	CPC
Allen, Malcolm	Welland	Ontario	NDP
Allen, Mike	Tobique—Mactaquac	New Brunswick	CPC
Allison, Dean	Niagara West—Glanbrook	Ontario	CPC
Ambler, Stella	Mississauga South	Ontario	CPC
Ambrose, Hon. Rona, Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women	Edmonton—Spruce Grove	Alberta	CPC
Anders, Rob	Calgary West	Alberta	CPC
Anderson, David, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board	Cypress Hills—Grasslands	Saskatchewan	CPC
Andrews, Scott	Avalon	Newfoundland and Labrador	Lib.
Angus, Charlie	Timmins—James Bay	Ontario	NDP
Armstrong, Scott	Cumberland—Colchester— Musquodoboit Valley	Nova Scotia	CPC
Ashfield, Hon. Keith, Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway	Fredericton	New Brunswick	CPC
Ashton, Niki	Churchill	Manitoba	NDP
Aspin, Jay	Nipissing—Timiskaming	Ontario	CPC
Atamanenko, Alex	British Columbia Southern Interior	British Columbia	NDP
Aubin, Robert	Trois-Rivières	Québec	NDP
Ayala, Paulina	Honoré-Mercier	Québec	NDP
Baird, Hon. John, Minister of Foreign Affairs	Ottawa West—Nepean	Ontario	CPC
Bateman, Joyce	Winnipeg South Centre	Manitoba	CPC
Bélanger, Hon. Mauril	Ottawa—Vanier	Ontario	Lib.
Bellavance, André	Richmond—Arthabaska	Québec	BQ
Bennett, Hon. Carolyn	St. Paul's	Ontario	Lib.
Benoit, Leon	Vegreville—Wainwright	Alberta	CPC
Benskin, Tyrone	Jeanne-Le Ber	Québec	NDP
Bernier, Hon. Maxime, Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism)	Beauce	Québec	CPC
Bevington, Dennis	Western Arctic	Northwest Territories	NDP
Bezan, James	Selkirk—Interlake	Manitoba	CPC
Blanchette, Denis	Louis-Hébert	Québec	NDP
Blanchette-Lamothe, Lysane	Pierrefonds—Dollard	Québec	NDP
Blaney, Hon. Steven, Minister of Veterans Affairs	Lévis—Bellechasse	Québec	CPC
Block, Kelly	Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar	Saskatchewan	CPC

Name of Member	Constituency	Province of Constituency	Political Affiliation
Boivin, Françoise	Gatineau	Québec	NDP
Borg, Charmaine	Terrebonne—Blainville	Québec	NDP
Boughen, Ray	Palliser	Saskatchewan	CPC
Boulerice, Alexandre	Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie	Québec	NDP
Boutin-Sweet, Marjolaine	Hochelaga	Québec	NDP
Brahmi, Tarik	Saint-Jean	Québec	NDP
Braid, Peter	Kitchener—Waterloo	Ontario	CPC
Breitkreuz, Garry	Yorkton—Melville	Saskatchewan	CPC
Brisson, Hon. Scott	Kings—Hants	Nova Scotia	Lib.
Brosseau, Ruth Ellen	Berthier—Maskinongé	Québec	NDP
Brown, Gordon	Leeds—Grenville	Ontario	CPC
Brown, Lois, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation	Newmarket—Aurora	Ontario	CPC
Brown, Patrick	Barrie	Ontario	CPC
Bruinooce, Rod	Winnipeg South	Manitoba	CPC
Butt, Brad	Mississauga—Streetsville	Ontario	CPC
Byrne, Hon. Gerry	Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte	Newfoundland and Labrador	Lib.
Calandra, Paul, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage	Oak Ridges—Markham	Ontario	CPC
Calkins, Blaine	Wetaskiwin	Alberta	CPC
Cannan, Ron	Kelowna—Lake Country	British Columbia	CPC
Carmichael, John	Don Valley West	Ontario	CPC
Caron, Guy	Rimouski-Neigette— Témiscouata—Les Basques	Québec	NDP
Carrie, Colin, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health	Oshawa	Ontario	CPC
Casey, Sean	Charlottetown	Prince Edward Island	Lib.
Cash, Andrew	Davenport	Ontario	NDP
Charlton, Chris	Hamilton Mountain	Ontario	NDP
Chicoine, Sylvain	Châteauguay—Saint-Constant	Québec	NDP
Chisholm, Robert	Dartmouth—Cole Harbour	Nova Scotia	NDP
Chisu, Corneliu	Pickering—Scarborough East	Ontario	CPC
Chong, Hon. Michael	Wellington—Halton Hills	Ontario	CPC
Choquette, François	Drummond	Québec	NDP
Chow, Olivia	Trinity—Spadina	Ontario	NDP
Christopherson, David	Hamilton Centre	Ontario	NDP
Clarke, Rob	Desnethé—Mississippi— Churchill River	Saskatchewan	CPC
Cleary, Ryan	St. John's South—Mount Pearl	Newfoundland and Labrador	NDP
Clement, Hon. Tony, President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario	Parry Sound—Muskoka	Ontario	CPC
Coderre, Hon. Denis	Bourassa	Québec	Lib.
Comartin, Joe	Windsor—Tecumseh	Ontario	NDP
Côté, Raymond	Beauport—Limoilou	Québec	NDP
Cotler, Hon. Irwin	Mount Royal	Québec	Lib.
Crowder, Jean	Nanaimo—Cowichan	British Columbia	NDP
Cullen, Nathan	Skeena—Bulkley Valley	British Columbia	NDP
Cuzner, Rodger	Cape Breton—Canso	Nova Scotia	Lib.
Daniel, Joe	Don Valley East	Ontario	CPC

Name of Member	Constituency	Province of Constituency	Political Affiliation
Davidson, Patricia	Sarnia—Lambton	Ontario	CPC
Davies, Don	Vancouver Kingsway	British Columbia	NDP
Davies, Libby	Vancouver East	British Columbia	NDP
Day, Anne-Marie	Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint- Charles	Québec	NDP
Dechert, Bob, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs	Mississauga—Erindale	Ontario	CPC
Del Mastro, Dean, Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs	Peterborough	Ontario	CPC
Devolin, Barry, The Acting Speaker	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes— Brock	Ontario	CPC
Dewar, Paul	Ottawa Centre	Ontario	NDP
Dion, Hon. Stéphane, Saint-Laurent—Cartierville	Saint-Laurent—Cartierville	Québec	Lib.
Dionne Labelle, Pierre	Rivière-du-Nord	Québec	NDP
Donnelly, Fin	New Westminster—Coquitlam	British Columbia	NDP
Doré Lefebvre, Rosane	Alfred-Pellan	Québec	NDP
Dreeshen, Earl	Red Deer	Alberta	CPC
Dubé, Matthew	Chambly—Borduas	Québec	NDP
Duncan, Hon. John, Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development	Vancouver Island North	British Columbia	CPC
Duncan, Kirsty	Etobicoke North	Ontario	Lib.
Duncan, Linda	Edmonton—Strathcona	Alberta	NDP
Dusseau, Pierre-Luc	Sherbrooke	Québec	NDP
Dykstra, Rick, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration	St. Catharines	Ontario	CPC
Easter, Hon. Wayne	Malpeque	Prince Edward Island	Lib.
Eyking, Hon. Mark	Sydney—Victoria	Nova Scotia	Lib.
Fantino, Hon. Julian, Associate Minister of National Defence	Vaughan	Ontario	CPC
Fast, Hon. Ed, Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway	Abbotsford	British Columbia	CPC
Findlay, Kerry-Lynne D., Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice	Delta—Richmond East	British Columbia	CPC
Finley, Hon. Diane, Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development	Haldimand—Norfolk	Ontario	CPC
Flaherty, Hon. Jim, Minister of Finance	Whitby—Oshawa	Ontario	CPC
Fletcher, Hon. Steven, Minister of State (Transport)	Charleswood—St. James— Assiniboia	Manitoba	CPC
Foote, Judy	Random—Burin—St. George's Labrador	Newfoundland and Labrador	Lib.
Fortin, Jean-François	Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis— Matane—Matapédia	Québec	BQ
Freeman, Mylène	Argenteuil—Papineau— Mirabel	Québec	NDP
Fry, Hon. Hedy	Vancouver Centre	British Columbia	Lib.
Galipeau, Royal	Ottawa—Orléans	Ontario	CPC
Gallant, Cheryl	Renfrew—Nipissing— Pembroke	Ontario	CPC
Gameau, Marc	Westmount—Ville-Marie	Québec	Lib.
Garrison, Randall	Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca	British Columbia	NDP
Genest, Réjean	Shefford	Québec	NDP
Genest-Jourdain, Jonathan	Manicouagan	Québec	NDP
Giguère, Alain	Marc-Aurèle-Fortin	Québec	NDP

Name of Member	Constituency	Province of Constituency	Political Affiliation
Gill, Pam	Brampton—Springdale	Ontario	CPC
Glover, Shelly, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance	Saint Boniface	Manitoba	CPC
Godin, Yvon	Acadie—Bathurst	New Brunswick	NDP
Goguen, Robert, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice	Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe	New Brunswick	CPC
Goldring, Peter	Edmonton East	Alberta	CPC
Goodale, Hon. Ralph	Wascana	Saskatchewan	Lib.
Goodyear, Hon. Gary, Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario)	Cambridge	Ontario	CPC
Gosal, Hon. Bal, Minister of State (Sport)	Bramalea—Gore—Malton	Ontario	CPC
Gourde, Jacques, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, for Official Languages and for the Economic Development Agency for the Regions of Quebec	Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la- Chaudière	Québec	CPC
Gravelle, Claude	Nickel Belt	Ontario	NDP
Grewal, Nina	Fleetwood—Port Kells	British Columbia	CPC
Groguhé, Sadia	Saint-Lambert	Québec	NDP
Harper, Right Hon. Stephen, Prime Minister	Calgary Southwest	Alberta	CPC
Harris, Dan	Scarborough Southwest	Ontario	NDP
Harris, Jack	St. John's East	Newfoundland and Labrador	NDP
Harris, Richard	Cariboo—Prince George	British Columbia	CPC
Hassainia, Sana	Verchères—Les Patriotes	Québec	NDP
Hawn, Hon. Laurie	Edmonton Centre	Alberta	CPC
Hayes, Bryan	Sault Ste. Marie	Ontario	CPC
Hiebert, Russ	South Surrey—White Rock— Cloverdale	British Columbia	CPC
Hillyer, Jim	Lethbridge	Alberta	CPC
Hoback, Randy	Prince Albert	Saskatchewan	CPC
Hoepfner, Candice, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety	Portage—Lisgar	Manitoba	CPC
Holder, Ed	London West	Ontario	CPC
Hsu, Ted	Kingston and the Islands	Ontario	Lib.
Hughes, Carol	Algoma—Manitoulin— Kapuskasing	Ontario	NDP
Hyer, Bruce	Thunder Bay—Superior North	Ontario	NDP
Jacob, Pierre	Brome—Missisquoi	Québec	NDP
James, Roxanne	Scarborough Centre	Ontario	CPC
Jean, Brian	Fort McMurray—Athabasca	Alberta	CPC
Julian, Peter	Burnaby—New Westminster	British Columbia	NDP
Kamp, Randy, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and for the Asia-Pacific Gateway	Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge— Mission	British Columbia	CPC
Karygiannis, Hon. Jim	Scarborough—Agincourt	Ontario	Lib.
Keddy, Gerald, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Interna- tional Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway	South Shore—St. Margaret's ...	Nova Scotia	CPC
Kellway, Matthew	Beaches—East York	Ontario	NDP
Kenney, Hon. Jason, Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism	Calgary Southeast	Alberta	CPC
Kent, Hon. Peter, Minister of the Environment	Thornhill	Ontario	CPC
Kerr, Greg	West Nova	Nova Scotia	CPC
Komaricki, Ed	Souris—Moose Mountain	Saskatchewan	CPC
Kramp, Daryl	Prince Edward—Hastings	Ontario	CPC

Name of Member	Constituency	Province of Constituency	Political Affiliation
Lake, Mike, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry ...	Edmonton—Mill Woods— Beaumont.....	Alberta	CPC
Lamoureux, Kevin	Winnipeg North	Manitoba	Lib.
Lapointe, François	Montmagny—L'Islet— Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup	Québec	NDP
Larose, Jean-François	Repentigny	Québec	NDP
Latendresse, Alexandrine	Louis-Saint-Laurent	Québec	NDP
Lauzon, Guy	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	Ontario	CPC
Laverdière, Hélène	Laurier—Sainte-Marie	Québec	NDP
Lebel, Hon. Denis, Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec	Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean	Québec	CPC
LeBlanc, Hon. Dominic	Beauséjour	New Brunswick	Lib.
LeBlanc, Hélène	LaSalle—Émard	Québec	NDP
Leef, Ryan	Yukon	Yukon	CPC
Leitch, Kellie, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour	Simcoe—Grey	Ontario	CPC
Lemieux, Pierre, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	Ontario	CPC
Leslie, Megan	Halifax	Nova Scotia	NDP
Leung, Chungsen, Parliamentary Secretary for Multiculturalism	Willowdale	Ontario	CPC
Liu, Laurin	Rivière-des-Mille-Îles	Québec	NDP
Lizon, Wladyslaw	Mississauga East—Cooksville	Ontario	CPC
Lobb, Ben	Huron—Bruce	Ontario	CPC
Lukiwski, Tom, Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons	Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre	Saskatchewan	CPC
Lunney, James	Nanaimo—Alberni	British Columbia	CPC
MacAulay, Hon. Lawrence	Cardigan	Prince Edward Island	Lib.
MacKay, Hon. Peter, Minister of National Defence	Central Nova	Nova Scotia	CPC
MacKenzie, Dave	Oxford	Ontario	CPC
Mai, Hoang	Brossard—La Prairie	Québec	NDP
Marston, Wayne	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek	Ontario	NDP
Martin, Pat	Winnipeg Centre	Manitoba	NDP
Masse, Brian	Windsor West	Ontario	NDP
Mathysen, Irene	London—Fanshawe	Ontario	NDP
May, Elizabeth	Saanich—Gulf Islands	British Columbia	GP
Mayes, Colin	Okanagan—Shuswap	British Columbia	CPC
McCallum, Hon. John	Markham—Unionville	Ontario	Lib.
McColeman, Phil	Brant	Ontario	CPC
McGuinty, David	Ottawa South	Ontario	Lib.
McKay, Hon. John	Scarborough—Guildwood	Ontario	Lib.
McLeod, Cathy, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue	Kamloops—Thompson— Cariboo	British Columbia	CPC
Menegakis, Costas	Richmond Hill	Ontario	CPC
Menzies, Hon. Ted, Minister of State (Finance)	Macleod	Alberta	CPC
Merrifield, Hon. Rob	Yellowhead	Alberta	CPC
Michaud, Éline	Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier	Québec	NDP
Miller, Larry	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	Ontario	CPC
Moore, Christine	Abitibi—Témiscamingue	Québec	NDP

Name of Member	Constituency	Province of Constituency	Political Affiliation
Moore, Hon. James, Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages.....	Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam.....	British Columbia.....	CPC
Moore, Hon. Rob.....	Fundy Royal.....	New Brunswick.....	CPC
Morin, Dany.....	Chicoutimi—Le Fjord.....	Québec.....	NDP
Morin, Isabelle.....	Notre-Dame-de-Grâce— Lachine.....	Québec.....	NDP
Morin, Marc-André.....	Laurentides—Labelle.....	Québec.....	NDP
Morin, Marie-Claude.....	Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot.....	Québec.....	NDP
Mourani, Maria.....	Ahuntsic.....	Québec.....	BQ
Mulcair, Thomas.....	Outremont.....	Québec.....	NDP
Murray, Joyce.....	Vancouver Quadra.....	British Columbia.....	Lib.
Nantel, Pierre.....	Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher....	Québec.....	NDP
Nash, Peggy.....	Parkdale—High Park.....	Ontario.....	NDP
Nicholls, Jamie.....	Vaudreuil-Soulanges.....	Québec.....	NDP
Nicholson, Hon. Rob, Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada.....	Niagara Falls.....	Ontario.....	CPC
Norlock, Rick.....	Northumberland—Quinte West	Ontario.....	CPC
Nunez-Melo, José.....	Laval.....	Québec.....	NDP
O'Connor, Hon. Gordon, Minister of State and Chief Government Whip.....	Carleton—Mississippi Mills....	Ontario.....	CPC
O'Neill Gordon, Tilly.....	Miramichi.....	New Brunswick.....	CPC
Obhrai, Deepak, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.....	Calgary East.....	Alberta.....	CPC
Oda, Hon. Bev, Minister of International Cooperation.....	Durham.....	Ontario.....	CPC
Oliver, Hon. Joe, Minister of Natural Resources.....	Eglinton—Lawrence.....	Ontario.....	CPC
Opitz, Ted.....	Etobicoke Centre.....	Ontario.....	CPC
Pacetti, Massimo.....	Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel....	Québec.....	Lib.
Papillon, Annick.....	Québec.....	Québec.....	NDP
Paradis, Hon. Christian, Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture).....	Mégantic—L'Érable.....	Québec.....	CPC
Patry, Claude.....	Jonquière—Alma.....	Québec.....	NDP
Payne, LaVar.....	Medicine Hat.....	Alberta.....	CPC
Péclet, Ève.....	La Pointe-de-l'Île.....	Québec.....	NDP
Penashue, Hon. Peter, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada.....	Labrador.....	Newfoundland and Labrador.....	CPC
Perreault, Manon.....	Montcalm.....	Québec.....	NDP
Pilon, François.....	Laval—Les Îles.....	Québec.....	NDP
Plamondon, Louis.....	Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet— Bécancour.....	Québec.....	BQ
Poilievre, Pierre, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario.....	Nepean—Carleton.....	Ontario.....	CPC
Preston, Joe.....	Elgin—Middlesex—London....	Ontario.....	CPC
Quach, Anne Minh-Thu.....	Beauharnois—Salaberry.....	Québec.....	NDP
Rae, Hon. Bob.....	Toronto Centre.....	Ontario.....	Lib.
Rafferty, John.....	Thunder Bay—Rainy River....	Ontario.....	NDP
Raïtt, Hon. Lisa, Minister of Labour.....	Halton.....	Ontario.....	CPC
Rajotte, James.....	Edmonton—Leduc.....	Alberta.....	CPC
Rathgeber, Brent.....	Edmonton—St. Albert.....	Alberta.....	CPC
Ravignat, Mathieu.....	Pontiac.....	Québec.....	NDP
Raynault, Francine.....	Joliette.....	Québec.....	NDP

Name of Member	Constituency	Province of Constituency	Political Affiliation
Regan, Hon. Geoff	Halifax West	Nova Scotia	Lib.
Reid, Scott	Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington	Ontario	CPC
Rempel, Michelle, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment	Calgary Centre-North	Alberta	CPC
Richards, Blake	Wild Rose	Alberta	CPC
Richardson, Lee	Calgary Centre	Alberta	CPC
Rickford, Greg, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario	Kenora	Ontario	CPC
Ritz, Hon. Gerry, Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board	Battlefords—Lloydminster	Saskatchewan	CPC
Rousseau, Jean	Compton—Stanstead	Québec	NDP
Saganash, Romeo	Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou	Québec	NDP
Sandhu, Jasbir	Surrey North	British Columbia	NDP
Savoie, Denise, The Deputy Speaker	Victoria	British Columbia	NDP
Saxton, Andrew, Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board and for Western Economic Diversification	North Vancouver	British Columbia	CPC
Scarpaleggia, Francis	Lac-Saint-Louis	Québec	Lib.
Scheer, Hon. Andrew, Speaker of the House of Commons	Regina—Qu'Appelle	Saskatchewan	CPC
Schellenberger, Gary	Perth—Wellington	Ontario	CPC
Seebach, Kyle	Brampton West	Ontario	CPC
Sellah, Djaouida	Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert	Québec	NDP
Sgro, Hon. Judy	York West	Ontario	Lib.
Shea, Hon. Gail, Minister of National Revenue	Egmont	Prince Edward Island	CPC
Shipley, Bev	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	Ontario	CPC
Shory, Devinder	Calgary Northeast	Alberta	CPC
Simms, Scott	Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor	Newfoundland and Labrador	Lib.
Sims, Jinny Jogindera	Newton—North Delta	British Columbia	NDP
Sitsabaiesan, Rathika	Scarborough—Rouge River	Ontario	NDP
Smith, Joy	Kildonan—St. Paul	Manitoba	CPC
Sopuck, Robert	Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette	Manitoba	CPC
Sorenson, Kevin	Crowfoot	Alberta	CPC
St-Denis, Lise	Saint-Maurice—Champlain	Québec	NDP
Stanton, Bruce, The Acting Speaker	Simcoe North	Ontario	CPC
Stewart, Kennedy	Burnaby—Douglas	British Columbia	NDP
Stoffer, Peter	Sackville—Eastern Shore	Nova Scotia	NDP
Storseth, Brian	Westlock—St. Paul	Alberta	CPC
Strahl, Mark	Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon	British Columbia	CPC
Sullivan, Mike	York South—Weston	Ontario	NDP
Sweet, David	Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale	Ontario	CPC
Thibeault, Glenn	Sudbury	Ontario	NDP
Tilson, David	Dufferin—Caledon	Ontario	CPC
Toet, Lawrence	Elmwood—Transcona	Manitoba	CPC
Toews, Hon. Vic, Minister of Public Safety	Provencher	Manitoba	CPC
Toone, Philip	Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine	Québec	NDP

Name of Member	Constituency	Province of Constituency	Political Affiliation
Tremblay, Jonathan	Montmorency—Charlevoix— Haute-Côte-Nord	Québec	NDP
Trost, Brad	Saskatoon—Humboldt	Saskatchewan	CPC
Trottier, Bernard	Etobicoke—Lakeshore	Ontario	CPC
Trudeau, Justin	Papineau	Québec	Lib.
Truppe, Susan, Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women	London North Centre	Ontario	CPC
Turmel, Nycole	Hull—Aylmer	Québec	NDP
Tweed, Merv	Brandon—Souris	Manitoba	CPC
Uppal, Hon. Tim, Minister of State (Democratic Reform)	Edmonton—Sherwood Park	Alberta	CPC
Valcourt, Hon. Bernard, Minister of State (Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency) (La Francophonie)	Madawaska—Restigouche	New Brunswick	CPC
Valeriote, Frank	Guelph	Ontario	Lib.
Van Kesteren, Dave	Chatham-Kent—Essex	Ontario	CPC
Van Loan, Hon. Peter, Leader of the Government in the House of Commons	York—Simcoe	Ontario	CPC
Vellacott, Maurice	Saskatoon—Wanuskewin	Saskatchewan	CPC
Wallace, Mike	Burlington	Ontario	CPC
Warawa, Mark	Langley	British Columbia	CPC
Warkentin, Chris	Peace River	Alberta	CPC
Watson, Jeff	Essex	Ontario	CPC
Weston, John	West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country	British Columbia	CPC
Weston, Rodney	Saint John	New Brunswick	CPC
Wilks, David	Kootenay—Columbia	British Columbia	CPC
Williamson, John	New Brunswick Southwest	New Brunswick	CPC
Wong, Hon. Alice, Minister of State (Seniors)	Richmond	British Columbia	CPC
Woodworth, Stephen	Kitchener Centre	Ontario	CPC
Yelich, Hon. Lynne, Minister of State (Western Economic Diversi- fication)	Blackstrap	Saskatchewan	CPC
Young, Terence	Oakville	Ontario	CPC
Young, Wai	Vancouver South	British Columbia	CPC
Zimmer, Bob	Prince George—Peace River	British Columbia	CPC
VACANCY	Toronto—Danforth	Ontario	

ALPHABETICAL LIST OF MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS BY PROVINCE

First Session—Forty-first Parliament

Name of Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALBERTA (28)		
Ablonczy, Hon. Diane, Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas and Consular Affairs)	Calgary—Nose Hill	CPC
Ambrose, Hon. Rona, Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women	Edmonton—Spruce Grove	CPC
Anders, Rob	Calgary West	CPC
Benoit, Leon	Vegreville—Wainwright	CPC
Calkins, Blaine	Wetaskiwin	CPC
Dreeshen, Earl	Red Deer	CPC
Duncan, Linda	Edmonton—Strathcona	NDP
Goldring, Peter	Edmonton East	CPC
Harper, Right Hon. Stephen, Prime Minister	Calgary Southwest	CPC
Hawn, Hon. Laurie	Edmonton Centre	CPC
Hillyer, Jim	Lethbridge	CPC
Jean, Brian	Fort McMurray—Athabasca	CPC
Kenney, Hon. Jason, Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism	Calgary Southeast	CPC
Lake, Mike, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry	Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont	CPC
Menzies, Hon. Ted, Minister of State (Finance)	Macleod	CPC
Merrifield, Hon. Rob	Yellowhead	CPC
Obhrai, Deepak, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs	Calgary East	CPC
Payne, LaVar	Medicine Hat	CPC
Rajotte, James	Edmonton—Leduc	CPC
Rathgeber, Brent	Edmonton—St. Albert	CPC
Rempel, Michelle, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment	Calgary Centre-North	CPC
Richards, Blake	Wild Rose	CPC
Richardson, Lee	Calgary Centre	CPC
Shory, Devinder	Calgary Northeast	CPC
Sorenson, Kevin	Crowfoot	CPC
Storseth, Brian	Westlock—St. Paul	CPC
Uppal, Hon. Tim, Minister of State (Democratic Reform)	Edmonton—Sherwood Park	CPC
Warkentin, Chris	Peace River	CPC
BRITISH COLUMBIA (36)		
Albas, Dan	Okanagan—Coquihalla	CPC
Atamanenko, Alex	British Columbia Southern Interior	NDP
Cannan, Ron	Kelowna—Lake Country	CPC
Crowder, Jean	Nanaimo—Cowichan	NDP
Cullen, Nathan	Skeena—Bulkley Valley	NDP
Davies, Don	Vancouver Kingsway	NDP
Davies, Libby	Vancouver East	NDP
Donnelly, Fin	New Westminster—Coquitlam	NDP
Duncan, Hon. John, Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development	Vancouver Island North	CPC
Fast, Hon. Ed, Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway	Abbotsford	CPC
Findlay, Kerry-Lynne D., Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice	Delta—Richmond East	CPC

Name of Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
Fry, Hon. Hedy	Vancouver Centre	Lib.
Garrison, Randall	Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca	NDP
Grewal, Nina	Fleetwood—Port Kells	CPC
Harris, Richard	Cariboo—Prince George	CPC
Hiebert, Russ	South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale	CPC
Julian, Peter	Burnaby—New Westminster	NDP
Kamp, Randy, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and for the Asia-Pacific Gateway	Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission	CPC
Lunney, James	Nanaimo—Alberni	CPC
May, Elizabeth	Saanich—Gulf Islands	GP
Mayes, Colin	Okanagan—Shuswap	CPC
McLeod, Cathy, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue	Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo	CPC
Moore, Hon. James, Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages	Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam	CPC
Murray, Joyce	Vancouver Quadra	Lib.
Sandhu, Jasbir	Surrey North	NDP
Savoie, Denise, The Deputy Speaker	Victoria	NDP
Saxton, Andrew, Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board and for Western Economic Diversification	North Vancouver	CPC
Sims, Jinny Jogindera	Newton—North Delta	NDP
Stewart, Kennedy	Burnaby—Douglas	NDP
Strahl, Mark	Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon	CPC
Warawa, Mark	Langley	CPC
Weston, John	West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country	CPC
Wilks, David	Kootenay—Columbia	CPC
Wong, Hon. Alice, Minister of State (Seniors)	Richmond	CPC
Young, Wai	Vancouver South	CPC
Zimmer, Bob	Prince George—Peace River	CPC

MANITOBA (14)

Ashton, Niki	Churchill	NDP
Bateman, Joyce	Winnipeg South Centre	CPC
Bezan, James	Selkirk—Interlake	CPC
Bruinooge, Rod	Winnipeg South	CPC
Fletcher, Hon. Steven, Minister of State (Transport)	Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia	CPC
Glover, Shelly, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance	Saint Boniface	CPC
Hoepfner, Candice, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety	Portage—Lisgar	CPC
Lamoureux, Kevin	Winnipeg North	Lib.
Martin, Pat	Winnipeg Centre	NDP
Smith, Joy	Kildonan—St. Paul	CPC
Sopuck, Robert	Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette	CPC
Toet, Lawrence	Elmwood—Transcona	CPC
Toews, Hon. Vic, Minister of Public Safety	Provencher	CPC
Tweed, Merv	Brandon—Souris	CPC

NEW BRUNSWICK (10)

Allen, Mike	Tobique—Mactaquac	CPC
Ashfield, Hon. Keith, Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway	Fredericton	CPC

Name of Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
Godin, Yvon	Acadie—Bathurst	NDP
Goguen, Robert, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice	Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe	CPC
LeBlanc, Hon. Dominic	Beauséjour	Lib.
Moore, Hon. Rob.	Fundy Royal	CPC
O'Neill Gordon, Tilly	Miramichi	CPC
Valcourt, Hon. Bernard, Minister of State (Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency) (La Francophonie)	Madawaska—Restigouche	CPC
Weston, Rodney	Saint John	CPC
Williamson, John	New Brunswick Southwest	CPC

NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR (7)

Andrews, Scott	Avalon	Lib.
Byrne, Hon. Gerry	Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte	Lib.
Cleary, Ryan	St. John's South—Mount Pearl	NDP
Foote, Judy	Random—Burin—St. George's	Lib.
Harris, Jack	St. John's East	NDP
Penashue, Hon. Peter, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada	Labrador	CPC
Simms, Scott	Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor	Lib.

NORTHWEST TERRITORIES (1)

Bevington, Dennis	Western Arctic	NDP
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NOVA SCOTIA (11)

Armstrong, Scott	Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley	CPC
Brisson, Hon. Scott	Kings—Hants	Lib.
Chisholm, Robert	Dartmouth—Cole Harbour	NDP
Cuzner, Rodger	Cape Breton—Canso	Lib.
Eyking, Hon. Mark	Sydney—Victoria	Lib.
Keddy, Gerald, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway	South Shore—St. Margaret's	CPC
Kerr, Greg	West Nova	CPC
Leslie, Megan	Halifax	NDP
MacKay, Hon. Peter, Minister of National Defence	Central Nova	CPC
Regan, Hon. Geoff	Halifax West	Lib.
Stoffer, Peter	Sackville—Eastern Shore	NDP

NUNAVUT (1)

Aglukkaq, Hon. Leona, Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency	Nunavut	CPC
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ONTARIO (105)

Adams, Eve, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs	Mississauga—Brampton South	CPC
Adler, Mark	York Centre	CPC
Albrecht, Harold	Kitchener—Conestoga	CPC
Alexander, Chris, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence	Ajax—Pickering	CPC
Allen, Malcolm	Welland	NDP

Name of Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
Allison, Dean	Niagara West—Glanbrook	CPC
Ambler, Stella	Mississauga South	CPC
Angus, Charlie	Timmins—James Bay	NDP
Aspin, Jay	Nipissing—Timiskaming	CPC
Baird, Hon. John, Minister of Foreign Affairs	Ottawa West—Nepean	CPC
Bélanger, Hon. Mauril	Ottawa—Vanier	Lib.
Bennett, Hon. Carolyn	St. Paul's	Lib.
Braid, Peter	Kitchener—Waterloo	CPC
Brown, Gordon	Leeds—Grenville	CPC
Brown, Lois, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation	Newmarket—Aurora	CPC
Brown, Patrick	Barrie	CPC
Butt, Brad	Mississauga—Streetsville	CPC
Calandra, Paul, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage	Oak Ridges—Markham	CPC
Carmichael, John	Don Valley West	CPC
Carrie, Colin, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health	Oshawa	CPC
Cash, Andrew	Davenport	NDP
Charlton, Chris	Hamilton Mountain	NDP
Chisu, Corneliu	Pickering—Scarborough East	CPC
Chong, Hon. Michael	Wellington—Halton Hills	CPC
Chow, Olivia	Trinity—Spadina	NDP
Christopherson, David	Hamilton Centre	NDP
Clement, Hon. Tony, President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario	Parry Sound—Muskoka	CPC
Comartin, Joe	Windsor—Tecumseh	NDP
Daniel, Joe	Don Valley East	CPC
Davidson, Patricia	Sarnia—Lambton	CPC
Dechert, Bob, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs	Mississauga—Erindale	CPC
Del Mastro, Dean, Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs	Peterborough	CPC
Devolin, Barry, The Acting Speaker	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	CPC
Dewar, Paul	Ottawa Centre	NDP
Duncan, Kirsty	Etobicoke North	Lib.
Dykstra, Rick, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration	St. Catharines	CPC
Fantino, Hon. Julian, Associate Minister of National Defence	Vaughan	CPC
Finley, Hon. Diane, Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development	Haldimand—Norfolk	CPC
Flaherty, Hon. Jim, Minister of Finance	Whitby—Oshawa	CPC
Galipeau, Royal	Ottawa—Orléans	CPC
Gallant, Cheryl	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	CPC
Gill, Parm	Brampton—Springdale	CPC
Goodyear, Hon. Gary, Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario)	Cambridge	CPC
Gosal, Hon. Bal, Minister of State (Sport)	Bramalea—Gore—Malton	CPC
Gravelle, Claude	Nickel Belt	NDP
Harris, Dan	Scarborough Southwest	NDP
Hayes, Bryan	Sault Ste. Marie	CPC
Holder, Ed	London West	CPC
Hsu, Ted	Kingston and the Islands	Lib.
Hughes, Carol	Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking	NDP
Hyer, Bruce	Thunder Bay—Superior North	NDP

Name of Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
James, Roxanne	Scarborough Centre	CPC
Karygiannis, Hon. Jim	Scarborough—Agincourt	Lib.
Kellway, Matthew	Beaches—East York	NDP
Kent, Hon. Peter, Minister of the Environment	Thornhill	CPC
Kramp, Daryl	Prince Edward—Hastings	CPC
Lauzon, Guy	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry ...	CPC
Leitch, Kellie, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour	Simcoe—Grey	CPC
Lemieux, Pierre, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	CPC
Leung, Chungsen, Parliamentary Secretary for Multiculturalism	Willowdale	CPC
Lizon, Wladyslaw	Mississauga East—Cooksville	CPC
Lobb, Ben	Huron—Bruce	CPC
MacKenzie, Dave	Oxford	CPC
Marston, Wayne	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek	NDP
Masse, Brian	Windsor West	NDP
Mathysen, Irene	London—Fanshawe	NDP
McCallum, Hon. John	Markham—Unionville	Lib.
McColeman, Phil	Brant	CPC
McGuinty, David	Ottawa South	Lib.
McKay, Hon. John	Scarborough—Guildwood	Lib.
Menegakis, Costas	Richmond Hill	CPC
Miller, Larry	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	CPC
Nash, Peggy	Parkdale—High Park	NDP
Nicholson, Hon. Rob, Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada	Niagara Falls	CPC
Norlock, Rick	Northumberland—Quinte West	CPC
O'Connor, Hon. Gordon, Minister of State and Chief Government Whip	Carleton—Mississippi Mills	CPC
Oda, Hon. Bev, Minister of International Cooperation	Durham	CPC
Oliver, Hon. Joe, Minister of Natural Resources	Eglinton—Lawrence	CPC
Opitz, Ted	Etobicoke Centre	CPC
Poilievre, Pierre, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario	Nepean—Carleton	CPC
Preston, Joe	Elgin—Middlesex—London	CPC
Rac, Hon. Bob	Toronto Centre	Lib.
Rafferty, John	Thunder Bay—Rainy River	NDP
Raïtt, Hon. Lisa, Minister of Labour	Halton	CPC
Reid, Scott	Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington	CPC
Rickford, Greg, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario	Kenora	CPC
Schellenberger, Gary	Perth—Wellington	CPC
Seeback, Kyle	Brampton West	CPC
Sgro, Hon. Judy	York West	Lib.
Shipley, Bev	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	CPC
Sitsabaiesan, Rathika	Scarborough—Rouge River	NDP
Stanton, Bruce, The Acting Speaker	Simcoe North	CPC
Sullivan, Mike	York South—Weston	NDP
Sweet, David	Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale	CPC
Thibeault, Glenn	Sudbury	NDP

Name of Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
Tilson, David	Dufferin—Caledon	CPC
Trottier, Bernard	Etobicoke—Lakeshore	CPC
Truppe, Susan, Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women	London North Centre	CPC
Valeriote, Frank	Guelph	Lib.
Van Kesteren, Dave	Chatham-Kent—Essex	CPC
Van Loan, Hon. Peter, Leader of the Government in the House of Commons	York—Simcoe	CPC
Wallace, Mike	Burlington	CPC
Watson, Jeff	Essex	CPC
Woodworth, Stephen	Kitchener Centre	CPC
Young, Terence	Oakville	CPC
VACANCY	Toronto—Danforth	

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND (4)

Casey, Sean	Charlottetown	Lib.
Easter, Hon. Wayne	Malpeque	Lib.
MacAulay, Hon. Lawrence	Cardigan	Lib.
Shea, Hon. Gail, Minister of National Revenue	Egmont	CPC

QUÉBEC (75)

Aubin, Robert	Trois-Rivières	NDP
Ayala, Paulina	Honoré-Mercier	NDP
Bellavance, André	Richmond—Arthabaska	BQ
Benskin, Tyrone	Jeanne-Le Ber	NDP
Bernier, Hon. Maxime, Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism)	Beauce	CPC
Blanchette, Denis	Louis-Hébert	NDP
Blanchette-Lamothe, Lysane	Pierrefonds—Dollard	NDP
Blaney, Hon. Steven, Minister of Veterans Affairs	Lévis—Bellechasse	CPC
Boivin, Françoise	Gatineau	NDP
Borg, Charmaine	Terrebonne—Blainville	NDP
Boulerice, Alexandre	Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie	NDP
Boutin-Sweet, Marjolaine	Hochelaga	NDP
Brahmi, Tarik	Saint-Jean	NDP
Brosseau, Ruth Ellen	Berthier—Maskinongé	NDP
Caron, Guy	Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques	NDP
Chicoine, Sylvain	Châteauguay—Saint-Constant	NDP
Choquette, François	Drummond	NDP
Coderre, Hon. Denis	Bourassa	Lib.
Côté, Raymond	Beauport—Limoilou	NDP
Cotler, Hon. Irwin	Mount Royal	Lib.
Day, Anne-Marie	Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles	NDP
Dion, Hon. Stéphane, Saint-Laurent—Cartierville	Saint-Laurent—Cartierville	Lib.
Dionne Labelle, Pierre	Rivière-du-Nord	NDP
Doré Lefebvre, Rosane	Alfred-Pellan	NDP
Dubé, Matthew	Chambly—Borduas	NDP
Dusseauult, Pierre-Luc	Sherbrooke	NDP
Fortin, Jean-François	Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia	BQ
Freeman, Mylène	Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel	NDP

Name of Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
Gameau, Marc	Westmount—Ville-Marie	Lib.
Genest, Réjean	Shefford	NDP
Genest-Jourdain, Jonathan	Manicouagan	NDP
Giguère, Alain	Marc-Aurèle-Fortin	NDP
Gourde, Jacques, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, for Official Languages and for the Economic Development Agency for the Regions of Quebec	Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière	CPC
Groguié, Sadia	Saint-Lambert	NDP
Hassainia, Sana	Verchères—Les Patriotes	NDP
Jacob, Pierre	Brome—Missisquoi	NDP
Lapointe, François	Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska— Rivière-du-Loup	NDP
Larose, Jean-François	Repentigny	NDP
Latendresse, Alexandrine	Louis-Saint-Laurent	NDP
Laverdière, Hélène	Laurier—Sainte-Marie	NDP
Lebel, Hon. Denis, Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec	Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean	CPC
LeBlanc, Hélène	LaSalle—Émard	NDP
Liu, Laurin	Rivière-des-Mille-Îles	NDP
Mai, Hoang	Brossard—La Prairie	NDP
Michaud, Éline	Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier	NDP
Moore, Christine	Abitibi—Témiscamingue	NDP
Morin, Dany	Chicoutimi—Le Fjord	NDP
Morin, Isabelle	Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine	NDP
Morin, Marc-André	Laurentides—Labelle	NDP
Morin, Marie-Claude	Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot	NDP
Mourani, Maria	Ahuntsic	BQ
Mulcair, Thomas	Outremont	NDP
Nantel, Pierre	Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher	NDP
Nicholls, Jamie	Vaudreuil-Soulanges	NDP
Nunez-Melo, José	Laval	NDP
Pacetti, Massimo	Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel	Lib.
Papillon, Annick	Québec	NDP
Paradis, Hon. Christian, Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture)	Mégantic—L'Érable	CPC
Patry, Claude	Jonquière—Alma	NDP
Péclét, Ève	La Pointe-de-l'Île	NDP
Perreault, Manon	Montcalm	NDP
Pilon, François	Laval—Les Îles	NDP
Plamondon, Louis	Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour	BQ
Quach, Anne Minh-Thu	Beauharnois—Salaberry	NDP
Ravignat, Mathieu	Pontiac	NDP
Raynault, Francine	Joliette	NDP
Rousseau, Jean	Compton—Stanstead	NDP
Saganash, Romeo	Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou	NDP
Scarpaleggia, Francis	Lac-Saint-Louis	Lib.
Sellah, Djaouida	Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert	NDP
St-Denis, Lise	Saint-Maurice—Champlain	NDP
Toone, Philip	Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine	NDP
Tremblay, Jonathan	Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute- Côte-Nord	NDP

Name of Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
Trudeau, Justin	Papineau	Lib.
Turmel, Nycole	Hull—Aylmer	NDP

SASKATCHEWAN (14)

Anderson, David, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board	Cypress Hills—Grasslands	CPC
Block, Kelly	Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar	CPC
Boughen, Ray	Palliser	CPC
Breitkreuz, Garry	Yorkton—Melville	CPC
Clarke, Rob	Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River	CPC
Goodale, Hon. Ralph	Wascana	Lib.
Hoback, Randy	Prince Albert	CPC
Komarnicki, Ed	Souris—Moose Mountain	CPC
Lukiwski, Tom, Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons	Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre	CPC
Ritz, Hon. Gerry, Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board	Battlefords—Lloydminster	CPC
Scheer, Hon. Andrew, Speaker of the House of Commons	Regina—Qu'Appelle	CPC
Trost, Brad	Saskatoon—Humboldt	CPC
Vellacott, Maurice	Saskatoon—Wanuskewin	CPC
Yelich, Hon. Lynne, Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification)	Blackstrap	CPC

YUKON (1)

Leef, Ryan	Yukon	CPC
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(As of November 4, 2011 — 1st Session, 41st Parliament)

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Frank Valeriote

Alex Atamanenko
Randy Hoback
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LaVar Payne

Francine Raynault
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Kelly Block	Richard Harris	Rob Merrifield	Susan Truppe
Ray Boughen	Laurie Hawn	Larry Miller	Merv Tweed
Peter Braid	Bryan Hayes	Rick Norlock	Dave Van Kesteren
Garry Breitzkreuz	Russ Hiebert	Tilly O'Neill Gordon	Maurice Vellacott
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Patrick Brown	Candice Hoepfner	Ted Opitz	Mark Warawa
Rod Bruinooge	Ed Holder	LaVar Payne	Chris Warkentin
Brad Butt	Bruce Hyer	Pierre Poilievre	Jeff Watson
Blaine Calkins	Roxanne James	Joe Preston	John Weston
Ron Cannan	Brian Jean	James Rajotte	Rodney Weston
John Carmichael	Peter Julian	Brent Rathgeber	David Wilks
Colin Carrie	Randy Kamp	Scott Reid	John Williamson
Corneliu Chisu	Jim Karygiannis	Michelle Rempel	Stephen Woodworth
Michael Chong	Gerald Keddy	Blake Richards	Wai Young
Rob Clarke	Greg Kerr	Lee Richardson	Bob Zimmer
Joe Daniel	Ed Komarnicki	Greg Rickford	

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Roxanne James				

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Harold Albrecht	Patricia Davidson	Guy Lauzon	Bev Shipley
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Leon Benoit	Robert Goguen	Phil McColeman	Bernard Trotter
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Ray Boughen	Nina Grewal	Larry Miller	Merv Tweed
Peter Braid	Richard Harris	Rob Moore	Dave Van Kesteren
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Gordon Brown	Bryan Hayes	Tilly O'Neill Gordon	Mike Wallace
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Patrick Brown	Jim Hillyer	LaVar Payne	Chris Warkentin
Rod Bruinooge	Randy Hoback	Pierre Poilievre	Jeff Watson
Brad Butt	Candice Hoepfner	Joe Preston	Rodney Weston
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Blaine Calkins	Brian Jean	Brent Rathgeber	John Williamson
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Michael Chong	Greg Kerr	Greg Rickford	

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Lise St-DenisLawrence Toet
Stephen Woodworth

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Hon. Bev Oda	Minister of International Cooperation
Hon. John Baird	Minister of Foreign Affairs
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Hon. Jim Flaherty	Minister of Finance
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Hon. Christian Paradis	Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture)
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Mr. Chungsen Leung	for Multiculturalism
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Mr. Mike Lake	to the Minister of Industry
Mr. Paul Calandra	to the Minister of Canadian Heritage
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Mr. Colin Carrie	to the Minister of Health
Mr. Randy Kamp	to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and for the Asia-Pacific Gateway
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Mrs. Cathy McLeod	to the Minister of National Revenue
Mr. Greg Rickford	to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario
Ms. Eve Adams	to the Minister of Veterans Affairs
Mr. Gerald Keddy	to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway
Mr. David Anderson	to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board

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HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Monday, November 14, 2011

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer



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(Table of Contents appears at back of this issue.)

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, November 14, 2011

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

● (1105)

[English]

POINTS OF ORDER

BILL C-317—INCOME TAX ACT—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I would like to return to the ruling I gave on Friday, November 4, 2011, in relation to ways and means proceedings and former Bill C-317, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (labour organizations), which stood on the order paper in the name of the hon. member for South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale.

[Translation]

As members know, I directed that the order for second reading of the bill be discharged and that the bill be withdrawn from the order paper.

[English]

In light of the unique nature of this particular situation, I directed that the member for South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale be permitted to substitute another item onto the order of precedence. In doing so, I inadvertently linked the time allotted to the member to do so at 20 sitting days in the spirit of the guidelines found in Standing Order 92.1. This was an error as Standing Order 92.1 provides for 20 calendar days. Instead, the link was intended to be to a 2006 example when another member, faced with similar circumstances, was granted 20 sitting days to select another item.

[Translation]

Therefore, the hon. member for South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale will have until Friday, December 9, 2011, to do so.

[English]

I regret any inconvenience that this may have caused hon. members.

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am rising on a point of order that involves one of the more serious matters that I have had to deal with in my 11 years here in the House because of the potential risk that it poses to the relationship the

legislative, administrative and judicial branches play in our Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, I am hoping that by the time I have concluded my argument you will agree with me that the assessment of our rules have been breached and that you will take appropriate action to ensure that the Standing Orders and the procedural sources higher than those that are in place are respected, not only by this chamber but also by the committees of this place.

I should start by saying that there are two potential orders that I will be seeking. The first one is the more appropriate one but clearly the more extensive one, which would be to direct the committee to cease the study it has initiated. I will speak to that more specifically in a moment. The alternative, which I would ask you to think about, would be, at the very least, that the committee be directed to suspend its study until such time as the courts, including the Appeal Court, and potentially even the Supreme Court of Canada in this case, have ruled on this issue.

It has been said in the House on more than one occasion that committees are their own masters. They are in control of their process. However, a deeper examination of our Standing Orders and the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* second edition, commonly called O'Brien and Bosc, reveals that the committee's freedom to do as it chooses is limited by firm boundaries. Indeed, O'Brien and Bosc, at page 1047, states:

...freedom committees normally have to organize their work as they see fit and the option they have of defining, on their own, certain rules of procedure that facilitate their proceedings.

However, on page 1048 the text reads:

These freedoms are not, however, total or absolute.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask you to take particular note of this point because I will return to it on a number of occasions throughout my remarks today. O'Brien and Bosc at page 1048 states:

At all times, directives from procedural sources higher than parliamentary committees (Constitution);—

I would suggest that includes constitutional convention, which is part of what the argument is here today. It goes on to state:

—statutes; orders of reference, instructions and Standing Orders of the House; and rulings by the Speaker)—

Both the Constitution and, in this case, a ruling by you, Mr. Speaker, would certainly have the authority of overriding the determination that has been made by the committee. It goes on to state:

—take precedence over any rules a committee may adopt.

Points of Order

The end result of that determination by O'Brien and Bosc is that you, as the Speaker of this House, have, at any given time, the authority to overrule the committee.

It is quite recognizable by everyone in the chamber and anyone who has been in Parliament for any length of time that the Speaker would only do that on rare occasions. I would submit that this is one of those rare occasions. The Speaker may be reluctant to deal with this given the long-standing practice of intervening only on very rare occasions.

The other point that often comes up at this stage is whether the Speaker should intervene when there has not been a report from committee. I recognize that there has been no report from committee. Given the circumstances of what is going on in that committee, there will never be a report from the committee on this point.

However, as has often been the case, the Speakers will reserve judgment on committee members until the report has been sent to the House. There are exceptions to that general rule.

As Speaker Fraser said on March 26, 1990, at page 9756 of the *Debates*, the practice of waiting for a report from committee before taking up a matter in this House is: “

...not an absolute one and that in very serious and special circumstances the Speaker may have to pronounce on a committee matter without the committee having reported to the House.

In that context, it is important that I rise on this point of order. It is as a result of actions taken by the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, which I will refer to henceforth as “the ethics committee”. I feel that the rules governing the procedures and practices of this place are being tested, challenged and, in fact, are being infringed upon if we look at some of the opinions we now have on this matter. It is certainly putting the committee and this House in a dangerous and unprecedented position. It is testing long-standing conventions and, I would argue, that we are breaching those long-standing conventions.

Through the actions of the ethics committee and despite the protests of two of the three opposition parties represented on the committee, it has attempted to throw out decades of parliamentary *sub judice* convention, which requires this place to respect the independence of the court. It goes beyond saying that we do have the three branches. While they are independent of each other, they sometimes overlap but the fairly clear guidelines among those three branches is a long-standing convention. We respect, adhere to and do whatever we can, regarding all three branches, to not cross that line between the three branches and usurp authority that lies in one of the other branches.

I believe the committee is also trying to distort the constitutional principle of the separation of powers in terms of that responsibility, in particular here, not between the administration branch and the other two, but between the legislative and judicial branches. I would submit that both of these rules supersede the rights of committees. We had a huge battle in the last Parliament over the rights of parliamentarians to access information with regard to the Afghan detainee documents and material. There are clear rulings on that but it is not an absolute and those other conventions that I just mentioned supersede.

I believe the breaching of those other rules requires action on your part, Mr. Speaker. The only authority to overrule the committee lies in your hands. In terms of the specifics of the case, I will not be able to give you as much detail as I think would be useful to you in making your decision because a good deal of what has transpired here has been in camera. The information I will be giving you will only be that information that has been in public and not behind closed doors.

On November 1, the government used its majority on the committee to quickly move in camera on a motion by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs. The motion was to compel the production of documents that are clearly the subject of ongoing litigation before the federal Court of Appeal. The purpose of producing the documents, according to the adopted motion, was to have the ethics committee, and this is extremely important, determine and assess exclusions. That is exactly what is before the federal court at the present time. Those are documents under section 68 of the Access to Information Act.

As a result of this meeting and the events that transpired in camera, the New Democratic and Liberal members of the committee felt that they could not continue their participation in the committee's work until they had the benefit of a legal opinion from the House of Commons Law Clerk, Mr. Robert Walsh. He has been in that post since 1999 and is recognized as the leading expert in the country on these specific types of issues, vis-à-vis the ability of Parliament to do certain things and the right and independence of the judiciary to conduct their roles free of legislative interference.

The decision to ask for the legal opinion was to ensure that the rights of the members of the committee were not being undermined or violated by attempts to push through a motion that may have been not only improper but not legal. As the opposition members were waiting for the opinion, government members held a subsequent in camera meeting, which they eventually reported out on, where they passed a motion demanding the production of the documents in question from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

• (1110)

Soon after the motion was adopted, Mr. Walsh in fact provided his legal opinion in the form of a letter in reply to the member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Speaker, I would just note that I have given you a copy of that opinion now.

Its contents support what would be my own opinion, and I hope yours, as well, on these three points: that the ethics committee is, first, far beyond the scope of its overall mandate; second, in breach of parliamentary convention; and third, in contravention of its constitutional boundary; all as a result of adopting that motion that kicked off the study in question.

Points of Order

Specifically about the opinion from Mr. Walsh, I put that in your possession again, I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to pay close attention to that opinion. Read it closely. I think it clearly sets out, in response to a series of questions from the member for Timmins—James Bay, where the breaches have occurred and the risk of further breaches occurring, in fact, the study continues and those documents are attempted to be forced from the CBC pending the outcome of the court case which is before the Federal Court of Appeal at the present time.

I would ask you, Mr. Speaker, to look at that and ask you to pay particular attention to these points that have been made, first, on the sub judice issue. Mr. Walsh addresses that convention, which is essentially that Parliament respects the work done by the judicial branch of government by not interfering or appearing to interfere with that work. He notes that Speaker Milliken described the sub judice convention by saying, “the House will await the determination of the court before discussing the matter—”.

In effect, what we are doing there is recognizing that the judicial branch has a particular expertise in this area. It has a constitutional mandate, as well, to provide that role. It is our role as legislators to consider the decisions that it makes, take them into account, make a decision at that point whether amendments are required to legislation, changes to legislation, or new legislation is required. That is where that line is. The judiciary is on one side, we relying as legislators on the other side of that line, on its expertise, both mandated and developed over a period of time in this country.

He then goes on, with regard to noting the same convention:

—the House and, by extension, its Committees will not undertake studies,—

I want to emphasize that:

—will not undertake studies, reviews or enquiries on matters that have been assigned by an Act of Parliament to an administrative tribunal or other public office, including Officers of Parliament—

In this case the Broadcasting Act assigns the specific responsibility to the Information Commissioner who has in fact been involved and is involved in that litigation that is before the Federal Court. There are three parties to that litigation: CBC, Information Canada, and a private broadcaster.

We have clearly ongoing litigation involving one of the officers of this House of Parliament, a crown corporation, and now a committee trying to insert itself into the process where it is clearly mandated that that role is to be played by the judiciary in this country.

He goes on, with regard to the division of powers, and this is perhaps maybe the most disturbing aspect of what is going on in front of the ethics committee at the current time, about the danger that the committee's actions are in violation of the Constitution Act, going back all the way to 1867, and of course the current Constitution Act.

On page 4 of his letter, Mr. Walsh outlines how the ethics committee study is overstepping the divisions of power set out by the act by attempting to make legal determinations which are the responsibilities of the courts. That role by the committee is clearly beyond its scope.

The intent is clear in this regard as the motion of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovern-

mental Affairs, which is now the basis for the committee study, says that the committee will, and I am quoting from the motion, “determine and assess exclusions”, which is exactly the role that is assigned to our judiciary, our courts, and in fact is the very specific subject of that litigation that is before the Federal Court of Appeal. It is seized with it. The arguments actually, I believe, have been made and we are waiting for a decision. Given the significance of the litigation that is going on, there is every possibility that this case, if an appeal is granted, will end up in front of the Supreme Court for a full argument.

●(1115)

I want to go back to the parliamentary secretary. He was not bashful about what he was doing. He went public with this in an article in the *Toronto Star* on November 3 of this year, saying it was his intention with the study to get ahead of the courts on this matter. That is not our role as legislators. It is absolutely the opposite of what we should be doing. We let the courts play their role and we then respond. However, he said it was to get ahead of the courts on this matter in order to save the court the time and expense of pursuing the matter. That is not at all within the determination of a parliamentary committee or Parliament as a whole. It has been assigned by the Constitution Act to be the responsibility of the courts. They determine that issue, not us as legislators.

If we were going to follow what the parliamentary secretary wants the committee to do, we would be really talking about a constitutional amendment. We would have to take away the exclusive jurisdiction of the courts and assign it either partially to committees or the House or totally to us, and take it away from the courts completely. There is no suggestion that we should be doing that. There is certainly no support that I have ever heard about us reducing the role of our judiciary in this regard. The courts are there to play the role of interpreting legislation and enforcing it in appropriate circumstances.

There is some emphasis I would like to provide to gain proper perspective of what the committee is doing, and I go back to the motion. The very first line of it is “to determine and assess” whether or not acts were followed by compelling the production of documents by a party to a matter before the courts. I am sure you will have no hesitation agreeing, Mr. Speaker, that it is the exclusive jurisdiction, not a shared jurisdiction, of the judicial branch of government. It is its exclusive jurisdiction.

Mr. Walsh is quite clear on this and stated that the ethics committee was nonetheless addressing a legal question that ought to be left to the courts to decide. He went on to say:

In my view, such initiatives are not within the constitutional functions of the House or, by extension, its committees and the use of the House's powers to demand the production of documents for such purposes could be found to be invalid and unenforceable at law.

Finally, he stated:

Such an encroachment would offend the separation of powers between the judicial and legislative functions and possibly call into question the validity of ETHI's proceedings.

Points of Order

It is opening the door, quite clearly, to not just the possibility but probability that Parliament and the judicial branch will end up in litigation. It is the last thing we need at any time. Trying to keep the demarcation lines between the two authorities in the country is very important.

I want to make one final point with regard to a matter that Mr. Walsh raised. He said that within the context, if the documents that are sought are going to be dealt with in camera throughout, that is certainly some saving grace because it would be less of an interference in the judicial authority in this country.

However, he then went on to caution the member for Timmins—James Bay, the committee as a whole and perhaps the House, about the possibility, even the probability, but the reasonable likelihood of leaks coming out committees. We know it happens. As much as we are all dutiful about ensuring it does not happen, leaks may be the result of a staff person and it may be inadvertent. He said even if that were the case, just the risk that there could be a leak would make it appear as if we were willing to justify what the committee was doing by taking that risk and saying it was more important for us to do this than the risk of interfering with the judicial process.

I want to go beyond what he said because there is a point that I wish he would have covered. It begs the question, if documents are in fact at some point compelled, turned over and looked at, for what purpose?

● (1120)

If it is staying in camera, I assume at some point the study will end up in a report, then one of two things has to happen. The committee members may refer the documents and use them for the basis of their report, which ultimately would come to this committee, and therefore clearly breach our responsibility not to challenge the independence of the judiciary and the division of powers in the constitution. It is either that scenario or they do not use the documents. Then we would ask, why are we having this process if we are not going to use the documents? If we are not going to use them in the report, why are we bothering pursuing these documents to the degree that we are? If they use them, it is improper. If they do not use them, the whole question would be, what are we doing and why are we doing it.

The obvious conclusion I would draw from that is that government members on the committee intend to use the documents for the basis of the study and the ultimate report they prepare. If that happens, then clearly they have breached the constitutional conventions and the whole issue of division of powers.

I should make one more point in terms of additional material that I have given you, Mr. Speaker.

This morning we received copies of two letters, one to the chair of the ethics committee that set out that they were enclosing with the letter two sets of documents, as I understood it, one that the committee members could use because they are not part of the litigation; there is no issue of them being produced and they are not subject to the protection of the legislation in the CBC's opinion. And two, a sealed envelope of documents asking the chair not to release those documents until the outcome of all the litigation before the

courts. The chair of that committee is presently seized with that request from the CBC.

Mr. Speaker, I have also given you a letter of opinion from the CBC's lawyers that was given to Mr. Lacroix, president of the corporation, setting out their legal opinion. The importance of that is that we would say it is clearly biased in favour of their own client. Having been a lawyer for a long time, I would not accept that.

More important, in all relevant aspects, it entirely agrees with Mr. Walsh's opinion that this process that has been undertaken by the committee is improper, has clearly crossed the bounds of both constitutional convention, and the constitutional division of powers between the judiciary and legislative branches.

I will conclude with this quote from Mr. Walsh's letter. He sums up his argument with the following:

In my view, respect for the constitutional framework of our parliamentary system of government is part of the rule of law which is the over-riding legal principle that makes a democratic system of government such as ours workable and credible.

That is from Mr. Walsh, not from me.

Mr. Speaker, I believe you have one of two choices of orders that you would make if you agree with the arguments that I have given you today. First, make an overall determination that the study from the very beginning, because of the direct and assessed part of that wording, clearly breaches the division of powers and the constitutional convention, and second, make a determination that the study, in its overall ambit, is beyond the scope and mandate of the ethics committee.

If you are not prepared to go that far in the alternative, I would ask that you, Mr. Speaker, direct that the committee suspend this study until such time as all of the litigation is completed. That would then give the committee the opportunity to have the expertise from our judiciary to make a final determination as to what would be in the report, whether new legislation is required or amendments are required to the existing legislation

● (1125)

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I note the member's intervention on this matter. As this issue is before a committee, I think it would be better to be argued before a committee. Regardless, we will take this matter under consideration and respond in due course.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, I would be inclined to disagree with the government representative.

As has been cited by my colleague from the New Democratic Party, the House does have a role to play when a committee is behaving in the manner in which it is currently behaving. He articulated quite well why it is that we have a role to play. We need to recognize the whole issue that was brought up by the member for Peterborough. One could look at it in terms of the motivations. However, for now let us strictly speak in terms of what has actually taken place because of this motion.

We all recognize the importance of judicial independence and respect for our courts. We recognize the role played by the law clerk and parliamentary counsel. We also recognize the role that we play in the House and the role that our committees are supposed to play. At times, I suspect we see actions that are lacking in respect of one of those jurisdictions. I believe, as the NDP House leader has pointed out, that we have witnessed that taking place over the last little while.

It is true that our standing committees have a great deal of freedom and discretion to do a wide variety of things. We do not question that; rather, we encourage it. However, when a committee crosses the line it is our responsibility to look into the matter and ensure that corrective action is taken. That is why we within the Liberal Party support the point that has been brought forward by the New Democratic House leader.

I would suggest the House does have the authority to look over what has taken place in the committee and to take action in order to make sure that there is respect for judicial independence. We know that the issue before us is before the Federal Court. There is ongoing litigation. A lot of details will be put before the court. To be open and fair, to have the committee perform in the way in which it has been shown a lack of respect for that judicial independence.

I will quote specifically from Mr. Walsh, the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel, who stated:

A Committee should not, in my view, take on the role of a court—or even appear to take on the role of a court—by addressing whether the position taken by a party to a pending legal dispute is correct. To do so is to encroach upon—or appear to encroach upon—the constitutional function of the courts which would offend the *sub judice* convention, the principle of the separation of powers between the judicial and legislative functions and possibly call into question the validity of the Committee's proceedings.

Mr. Walsh is not a partisan individual. He is indeed the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel. We should all make note of what he is saying and acknowledge that the committee has gone too far.

I make reference to the motion itself. One could call into question its motivation. To say the least, we all know that the government has not been friendly in terms of the CBC. Many within the government's ranks would like to see the demise of the CBC. I believe there might be a hidden agenda behind that motion. That is why I believe that, at the end of the day, we have to ensure that the right thing is done here.

Mr. Speaker, the government has stepped over the line. We suggest that the government do the honourable thing because I suspect that it has put you and others in a fairly awkward position.

• (1130)

I believe that if the government read the letter that our law clerk has provided, it would come to the same conclusions as the Liberals and the New Democrats already have, and that is that the motion is not appropriate.

In coming up with that conclusion, I would suggest that the government House leader and the government of the day would be doing a service to the House if they would just agree to withdraw or suspend, do whatever is necessary in order to resolve this matter so that we are more in keeping with the spirit of the importance of judicial independence and respect of our courts.

Points of Order

We stand in support of the point of order that has been raised by the House leader of the official opposition.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, just a small point, I still want time to consider the arguments made by the House leader of the official opposition.

We do not have any secret agenda for the CBC. I watch it quite often. I watch the hockey games. Other people watch the hockey games, too. We have no hidden agenda as suggested by a member of the third party.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I also want to rise and speak to the point of order that has been put to you by the hon. House leader of the official opposition.

The legal opinion we have before us, regardless of the content, without getting into whether we are for or against the CBC, or whether there is a hidden agenda, is a grave and serious matter. It cuts to the heart of the rule of law, on the Constitution of this country, and the proper respect for boundaries, roles and responsibilities of this place, respect for our courts, and adequately understanding the role of Parliament.

Other sections of Mr. Walsh's fine legal opinion have been read out this morning, but I was particularly taken by the words of Mr. Justice Binnie, Supreme Court of Canada, in the 2005 case, the House of Commons and the hon. Gilbert Parent v. Satnam Vaid. It is a case in which we are generally familiar with the facts.

It is a very strong statement from the Supreme Court of Canada. I will quote:

It is a wise principle that the courts and Parliament strive to respect each other's role in the conduct of public affairs. Parliament, for its part, refrains from commenting on matters before the courts under the *sub judice* rule. The courts, for their part, are careful not to interfere with the workings of Parliament.

It goes on to note that Mr. Walsh, as the law clerk, our legal adviser, warns that in some circumstances the interference of a parliamentary committee in matters that are before the courts could be "seen as a contempt of court."

In other words, this cannot be a matter left with the committee. The committee, for whatever intentions it has, and I am not commenting on those, is placing the House of Commons at risk of further court proceedings in which this place, the Parliament of Canada, could be found by the courts to have entered into a relationship which constitutes contempt of court.

We must respect our roles and responsibilities. This will be a difficult ruling for you, Mr. Speaker. I think this may be your watershed moment as our Speaker. I trust in your wisdom and judgment on this, but Mr. Walsh's legal opinion is not easily dismissed.

I urge you, Mr. Speaker, to find in favour of the point of order from the official opposition.

• (1135)

The Speaker: I certainly thank all hon. members for their interventions, and will, of course, examine very closely the materials provided to me by the House leader of the official opposition.

Private Members' Business

I know members are aware of the long-standing practice that until a report is before the House, it is not for the Speaker to decide these types of things. I will come back to the House in due course.

It being 11:37 a.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

PURPLE DAY ACT

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.) moved that Bill C-278, An Act respecting a day to increase public awareness about epilepsy, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the applause from colleagues of various parties on this bill. In fact, I appreciate my hon. colleague from Charlottetown agreeing to second this. This morning, my colleague and friend, we were at law school together a few years ago, the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands, also wanted to second the bill. The indications are that there seems to be widespread support from all parties for this bill, which is Bill C-278, the Purple Day bill.

This bill was not developed overnight. In fact, for several years several of us in the House have been celebrating Purple Day. I hope more will next year. Purple Day was established by a young lady named Cassidy Megan in 2008. At the time, she was nine years old. She had had her first attack of epilepsy when she was seven and was concerned, embarrassed and worried about it and the reactions of others. She recognized that people did not have much knowledge about epilepsy and that they ought to. Therefore, when she was nine she had the idea that perhaps her school could have a day to recognize epilepsy and to create more awareness and understanding of it. That was really where it all started. From that has spread an international grassroots movement. I am very proud to say that it started in my riding of Halifax West, although it is really Cassidy Megan who deserves the credit for this, obviously.

I also want to thank the Epilepsy Association of Nova Scotia, the Canadian Epilepsy Alliance, the Epilepsy Support Centre and many other organizations for their support of Purple Day. I understood Purple Day was celebrated in more than 47 countries, but I saw today an article in *iPolitics* by Jon Waddell, who says it is now celebrated in 60 countries. I am delighted to hear that. It is great that it is increasing.

The long title of the bill is, "an act respecting a day to increase public awareness about epilepsy". Bill C-278 would formally establish March 26 as Purple Day in Canada and it would encourage people to wear the colour purple on that day. Purple Day would not be a legal holiday.

Epilepsy affects 300,000 Canadians and over 50 million people worldwide. In fact, I understand that is more than multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy and Parkinson's disease all combined. Of course, these are all significant diseases which obviously also require our attention.

Let me talk for a moment about a few of the famous people who have had epilepsy. It is quite a list. It includes: Fyodor Dostoevsky; Neil Young; Lindsey Buckingham; Prince, or the Artist Formerly Known as Prince; Florence Griffith Joyner, who won gold medals in the Olympics; Margaux Hemingway; Danny Glover; and Pope Pius IX.

There are also many cases where doctors and experts have looked back and given retrospective diagnoses on people who may have had it a long time ago. This is not for certain, but some of the names include: Alexander the Great, Socrates, Julius Caesar, St. Paul, Molière, Tennyson, Byron, Napoleon Bonaparte, Harriet Tubman, Beethoven, Handel, Agatha Christie, Charles Dickens, Vincent Van Gogh, Lewis Carroll and George Gershwin. In fact, it is not surprising when we hear all these names that there has been some sort of consideration and discussion over the years about a link between epilepsy and greatness, because there are some really incredible names among this group.

Cassidy chose the colour purple after the international colour for epilepsy, which is lavender. The lavender flower is often associated with solitude. It is representative of feelings of isolation that are often felt, understandably, by many of those affected by epilepsy and other seizure disorders. They often feel misunderstood, embarrassed and afraid. It is important to overcome those feelings, which is why this is such a great idea, I think.

● (1140)

[Translation]

A deeper understanding of epilepsy will help educate people about what needs to be done during a seizure and will help provide more security and support for people with epilepsy.

[English]

Imagine someone who has just turned 16 and is looking forward to getting his or her driver's license. The person passes the test the first time. A week later he or she has a seizure for the first time and ends up in hospital. The doctor tells the individual that he or she cannot drive for one year, after the excitement of just getting his or her licence. Not only that, but the individual can no longer compete with the cheerleading team. This is just one example of all of the stories I have heard from people who have epilepsy.

Imagine what it must be like for a person to have a seizure at work or school and people's reaction because of their lack of knowledge and understanding about this disorder. When the person comes out of the seizure he or she feels scared and confused. Imagine the security and support people affected with this disorder would feel if people became more aware about epilepsy and the different kinds of seizures and what to do if someone has a seizure.

The Canadian Epilepsy Alliance has an excellent website, epilepsymatters.com, which offers advice on what to do if someone has a seizure. I am sure there are other places where people can find information but this website has great information. It has a page, for example, on first aid for convulsive seizures. There are also non-convulsive seizures and people can read about them on the website.

This is what to do if someone has a convulsive seizure: First, do not panic. Stay calm. Second, time the seizure. If it is longer than five minutes, call an ambulance. Third, explain what is going on to those around the individual. Ask people to stand back and give space. The last thing a person needs when he or she comes out of a seizure is to have a big crowd looking on which could make the person feel even more anxious. Fourth, cushion the person's head and neck with something soft, such as a pillow or a coat, to avoid the person being injured. Fifth, roll the person on his or her side to prevent choking. Clear the area of dangers, such as a hot cup of coffee or a knife or other sharp objects. Get those things out of the way. Do not put anything in the individual's mouth. Do not restrain or hold the individual or try to stop him or her from moving. Speak gently. Be kind to the person during and after the seizure so that when the seizure is over he or she will be calm and those around will also be calm. Another suggestion is to loosen the person's tie or shirt collar.

I hope the bill will get Canadians talking about epilepsy and learning about seizure disorders. That was Cassidy's objective when she founded Purple Day.

In a recent letter, Cassidy explained why she undertook this project. She said that she started Purple Day when she was nine because when she was seven and first found out that she had epilepsy, she was afraid and embarrassed of what other people would think. She was afraid that they would treat her differently and not be her friends. She also thought that she was the only kid in the world with epilepsy. She wanted to have one day where everyone in the world would show support for people with epilepsy and teach people about epilepsy and that people with epilepsy would know they were not alone. She said that people need to know there are different types of seizures and that people do not have to be afraid of epilepsy or of people who have it. She said it would also help people know for sure when Purple Day is. She said that education about epilepsy is important for those living with epilepsy so they know they are not alone.

That is quite a remarkable statement from a girl who is now 12 years old.

I want to congratulate Cassidy on her hard work and imagination in establishing Purple Day. Bill C-278 would bring Cassidy's dream to fruition in Canada. I hope the bill will pass so that it will be officially enshrined in law for Purple Day on March 26, 2012.

This is a case where all MPs can come together to do something positive, and I think we are going to see that today and in the days to come.

I am honoured to be the sponsor of this legislation. This is certainly not my bill; it is Cassidy's bill. I would not have learned as much as I have about Purple Day if it were not for her initiating this idea. I undoubtedly would not have been the person to bring this

forward if it were not for Cassidy Megan and her efforts and her bold idea.

Let us recognize Cassidy's bold idea. Let us recognize Cassidy's imagination. Let us recognize Cassidy's courage. Let us move the bill forward.

• (1145)

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge my colleague for bringing forward Bill C-278. The member's comments were very helpful and accurate from my personal experience in living with a family member with seizure disorder.

I was particularly struck by the member's comments regarding the link between epilepsy and greatness. In some countries in Africa there is a connection made between those with seizure disorder and those who are especially potent, creative people, spiritual healers and leaders in their communities. Raising awareness of this disorder is an important task and I congratulate the member on this initiative and I congratulate Cassidy for having stimulated it.

Are there specific activities the member would see for Purple Day?

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her comments and kind words.

I think Cassidy and others involved with Purple Day to promote epilepsy awareness would want people not only to wear purple but also to learn about epilepsy on Purple Day, March 26. I would encourage everyone to visit the website, epilepsymatters.com, which is the website of the Canadian Epilepsy Association. The website has some very simple and clear information.

I would hope that we would have activities not only here but elsewhere in other countries. This movement has spread to 60 countries already. People would become more aware of what epilepsy is and how it happens. For example, epilepsy has to do with electrical currents in the brain. When there is a bit of an electrical storm, one might say, the nerve signals from the brain to the body do not work the way they should. The reason a person may be staring is that the signals from his or her eyes are not getting to his or her brain in order to understand what is happening.

It is interesting to read and learn about epilepsy. I hope that Purple Day would be an occasion for people to take the time to do that.

• (1150)

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Halifax West for presenting Bill C-278. The member mentioned that one should do when someone is having a seizure. People call 911, but in rural areas often it is the firefighters who arrive before the ambulance. They are well trained in CPR, but are they trained to know the signs of a seizure and what to do if someone is having a seizure?

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Lambton—Kent—Middlesex for his kind words, his support of the bill and for his question, which is an excellent one.

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While I would anticipate that people who are first responders would have training in how to deal with epilepsy, I do not know for sure. Firefighters visit us on the Hill. They were here a few weeks ago. We might ask them, or folks in our own ridings, whether that is the case. At the very least we can be sure that by promoting Purple Day and events that create awareness of this disorder people would become aware of what to do. That would include first responders. I suspect most of them would be well trained, as is usually the case, but it is something to check into to make sure.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to this very important issue that affects so many Canadians and their families. Bill C-278 seeks to raise awareness about epilepsy by establishing March 26 as Purple Day in Canada. I would like to thank the hon. member for Halifax West for introducing this important bill. I would further like to congratulate him for his advocacy on this matter and especially for his work with Cassidy Megan, a constituent from his riding.

Cassidy is a young Canadian with epilepsy. In 2008, Cassidy created the idea of a Purple Day campaign to dispel myths about epilepsy and inform those with seizures that they are not alone. Cassidy's initiative quickly caught on. In 2009, Purple Day was launched internationally. Since then it has been observed by many people in countries around the world. Cassidy's work to raise awareness about epilepsy represents the best of what young Canadians can do and I congratulate her for her efforts.

Epilepsy is a serious disease that affects over 300,000 Canadians and 50 million people worldwide. It is a physical condition characterized by sudden brief changes in the way the brain works. It is a symptom of a neurological disorder that affects the brain and shows itself in the form of seizures. It is usually diagnosed after a person has had at least two seizures that were not caused by a known medical condition, like extremely low blood sugar.

Each year approximately 15,000 Canadians, the majority of them children and seniors, learn that they have epilepsy. The nature, frequency and intensity of epileptic seizures vary from person to person. Some seizures are hardly noticed while others are totally disabling. Contrary to popular opinion, there is no evidence to suggest that they cause brain injury, nor to indicate that they result in developmental delay. There is no cure for epilepsy. The major form of treatment for Canadians with epilepsy is long-term drug therapy. The side effects of this medication and the costs associated with it are burdens that Canadians bear every day.

Despite this, we now know that epilepsy is perfectly compatible with a normal, happy and full life. Most people with epilepsy go to school, make friends, date, have jobs and raise families. It is not always easy. Sometimes coping with the reactions of other people can be the most difficult part of living with this disorder. Oftentimes, the very unpredictability of seizures can lead to low self-esteem and self-confidence, as well as depression. However, by raising awareness of what it is like to live with epilepsy, we can help affected Canadians to reach their full potential.

Although many Canadians living with this condition lead full and successful lives, others will need ongoing support from their families, friends and caregivers, as well as the health system. Good

medical care is based on a partnership and commitment between health providers, patients and caregivers.

We know that caring for patients with chronic medical and neurological disorders is often associated with significant stress and additional responsibility for family and friends. We are just starting to learn about the burden experienced by caregivers of patients with epilepsy and how to support them.

The burden of care carries emotional, psychological, physical and economic impacts, as well as related distressing feelings such as loneliness, shame, anger and feelings of guilt. Validation and the right support system have been shown to have a positive impact on patients and their caregivers, and we have to continue efforts in this area. Support systems for people with epilepsy, their families and their caregivers exist in the form of national organizations that provide information and support for Canadians living with epilepsy and their families and friends.

For example, Epilepsy Canada, founded in 1966, is a non-profit organization whose mission is to enhance the quality of life for persons affected by epilepsy. Through promotion and support of research, education and awareness initiatives, this organization is building understanding and acceptance of epilepsy.

The Canadian Epilepsy Alliance is a Canada-wide network of grassroots organizations dedicated to the promotion of independence and quality of life for people with epilepsy and their families. By providing support services, information, advocacy and public awareness, it too is working to make a difference for those living with epilepsy.

Likewise, the Government of Canada is pleased to work with its partners and stakeholders to promote epilepsy awareness by investing in activities that support a stronger evidence base and strengthen our knowledge of epilepsy.

The Government of Canada recognizes the challenges facing people with epilepsy, their families and their caregivers. The strength and resolve that they demonstrate each and every day is an inspiration to us all.

• (1155)

The government applauds efforts like those of Cassidy to erase the social stigma associated with epilepsy and to help establish stronger communities for people affected by it. Our support of Bill C-278 is a small but significant way in which we can promote understanding and continue to show support for those with epilepsy.

The government is also committed to ensuring that Canadians with epilepsy have stable access to safe, effective and affordable treatment. For many people living with epilepsy, long-term drug therapies are an essential element of their treatment regime. As such, I would like to outline some of the ways the government does this.

The federal government regulates all drugs in Canada, including anti-epileptic drugs. This work ensures that high quality drugs are safe and effective when they reach the Canadian marketplace. Through the Patented Medicine Prices Review Board, the government further ensures that the prices for new drugs reaching the market, including those that are breakthrough drugs, are not excessive.

The role of the government does not end when drugs are approved for sale in the Canadian market. Decisions must be made about which drugs to use. This is especially true with epilepsy. Epilepsy takes many forms and there are many drugs available to treat it. Access to evidence-based information is therefore crucial for making informed decisions that harness the benefits of drug therapies while getting the best value from every health care dollar.

The Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health provides decision makers with the evidence, analysis, advice and recommendations they require to make informed decisions on the treatment of conditions such as epilepsy. The agency administers the Common Drug Review, a pan-Canadian process for generating objective, rigorous reviews of the clinical, cost-effectiveness and patient evidence for drugs. The Common Drug Review also provides exemplary listing recommendations to the publicly funded drug plans in Canada and makes its recommendations public so Canadians can have access to information that affects the health care they receive.

This work proved valuable for people with epilepsy, most recent in a rapid-response report issued by the Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health in April 2011. The report listed guidelines for when a single drug should be used for epilepsy treatment and for when more than one drug should be used. It indicated which drugs to use when more than one drug was needed and it provided these guidelines for adults, pregnant women and children. This report will be useful for patients, physicians and pharmacists alike. It will facilitate the decisions surrounding which drug to take and under what circumstances. A single, clear and Canada-wide standard was not available prior to this.

Another rapid response report was issued in April 2011 on the safety and comparative effectiveness profile of a new drug for epilepsy. The new drug was assessed against standard epilepsy drug therapies for clinical effectiveness, safety and cost effectiveness. The report provides evidence to help set the new drug in the context of other drug therapies available. This makes it easier for people with epilepsy and their health care team to decide whether to use the new drug and why.

Through the work of the Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health, the government helps epilepsy patients and physicians decide on a course of treatment according to the best available evidence. Additionally, the government recognizes that when it comes to people with neurological conditions, there is a lot that we simply do not know. Epilepsy is no exception to this. That is

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why the government has been supporting research to raise awareness and improve our understanding of epilepsy.

One such research initiative is a four year national population health study of neurological conditions announced in 2009. This initiative is a suite of studies aiming to fill gaps in knowledge about individuals with neurological conditions, their families and their caregivers. The studies are administered by the Public Health Agency of Canada. They will provide key information to improve current knowledge about the incidence and prevalence of neurological conditions. Some will study the risk factors for the development and progression of neurological conditions. Others will investigate the use of health services by patients, identify gaps in the services and recommend improvements. Finally, studies will assess the impact of neurological conditions on individuals, families, caregivers and communities.

Canadians living with epilepsy face unique physical and social challenges in managing their condition. We have made great strides in helping people with epilepsy to lead full and happy lives, but there is still much work to be done. Bill C-278 is a step in the right direction. By declaring March 26 to be purple day in Canada, we will be working with a community of people with epilepsy, their families and their caregivers to demystify the social stigma surrounding epilepsy.

• (1200)

[Translation]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today we are debating Bill C-278. Before I start my speech, I want to give a little background for those who may be watching at home. In 2008, a young girl from Halifax named Cassidy Megan, then 9 years old, wanted to get other children in her circle talking about epilepsy and to let other children living with epilepsy know that they are not alone. I would be very happy if this day were recognized finally by Parliament in 2011.

Thanks to the Epilepsy Association of Nova Scotia, Purple Day is now celebrated in over 35 countries. Epilepsy affects over 50 million people in the world—more than multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy and Parkinson's disease combined. We invest a lot of money in the diseases I just mentioned and there is a lot of work done to promote awareness. However, epilepsy is often forgotten. It would be a very good thing for Parliament to pass this bill.

I would like to explain what epilepsy is, as most people have only a passing knowledge of it. We have seen the shocking images of a child convulsing on the floor, sometimes foaming at the mouth. We do not know what to do when that happens. I am going to talk a little bit about what happens when someone has epilepsy.

Private Members' Business

Epilepsy is a brain disorder that causes seizures. Abnormal functioning of the brain's cells produces a sudden, acute, fleeting electrical discharge in certain parts of the brain. After an abnormal electrical discharge, people having an epileptic seizure experience a change in their usual personality for a moment. They lose control of their body. They lose consciousness. That is really what happens.

Epilepsy is one of the most common neurological disorders. Some 50 million people around the world have epilepsy and an estimated one in 100 Canadians has it. That is a rather significant number. The average person easily knows 100 people. It is quite possible that one of them has epilepsy. It could be a young child, an adult or a senior. This disorder can cause other problems related to the person's age. I will get into that a little later.

One in 100 Canadians adds up to 300,000 people in Canada, which is not insignificant. This is a global problem, a national problem. It is important that both the NDP and the rest of House of Commons take concrete measures to help those suffering from epilepsy and the loved ones taking care of them. We must also raise awareness among all Canadians about what people with epilepsy are going through.

Epilepsy affects more people than multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy and Parkinson's disease combined. It is a major problem in Canada. How does epilepsy affect everyday life? According to the International League Against Epilepsy, epilepsy can have serious physical, psychological and social repercussions due mainly to the unpredictability of the seizures. During these seizures, people lose control of their bodies. They do not choose at what time of day or night an abnormal electrical discharge is going to trigger a seizure.

Imagine what could happen on the roads if a person is driving and suffers an epileptic seizure. Imagine what could happen if someone was going down the stairs and had a seizure. Losing control of your body is a serious problem. The physical dangers are particularly worrying because the seizures are unpredictable. Surely the two examples I just provided demonstrate why I feel that epilepsy is a problem that Parliament should be addressing.

I want to provide another example. This one focuses more on the psychological and social aspects of epilepsy. A new father does not dare hold his newborn for fear of having a seizure and dropping the baby. Epilepsy can have numerous repercussions on an individual's life, no matter what his or her age. It is important for children to be accepted at school and in their social circle. Children who have an epileptic seizure at school could feel stigmatized because their classmates do not understand what is happening.

• (1205)

There could be social implications for these children who have epileptic episodes.

If we look outside Canada at developing countries, one statistic claims that 60% to 90% of people living with epilepsy do not receive any form of treatment because of a lack of resources and health care services as well as social stigma. Many people are left untreated and must live with this condition without any hope for improvement or, at the very least, control over their situation. And epilepsy can be controlled.

In terms of treatment, at least 70% of people with epilepsy react well to treatment, but 30% do not respond to currently available treatments and still have uncontrolled seizures. In Canada, where people receive treatment, three-quarters of them take medication and their epilepsy is under control. However, there are still gaps in the medical and pharmaceutical science: the medication does not work for one person out of every four.

It is therefore important that Canada invest in research in order to find new anti-epileptic drugs that will help these people in their lives.

It is also important to improve access to global epilepsy assessment and treatment programs. Epilepsy affects Canadians and people outside Canada. It is also important to make everyone aware of this condition. It is not an illness; it is a condition.

It is also important to increase funding for research in this area. As I mentioned earlier, the medication available is insufficient and is not yet effective in all cases. It is therefore important to invest in research.

The pharmaceutical aspect aside, there is also another possible treatment. As I already said, one in four Canadians does not respond to the medication, or the medication is not effective in treating them. Surgery could therefore be a worthwhile option. It is the only solution for at least half of the people who do not respond to the medication. It is therefore important to make these young people aware that there is another form of treatment available and to advance the research to make this treatment safer.

I would now like to present the NDP's position. We are in favour of this bill. This day has been celebrated across the world for a number of years now. It is important that it be celebrated as early as possible in Canada and that it be enshrined in law.

However, I am a bit disappointed that this bill is not larger in scope. In the end, the bill merely serves to designate March 26 as Epilepsy Awareness Day and to encourage people to wear purple on that day.

In our opinion, it would be better to take this bill one step further in order to find concrete measures to help those who suffer from epilepsy and their loved ones. However, this bill is a step in the right direction.

I have an interesting statistic for you. Right now, we know that there is a drug shortage in Canada. We know that the Conservative government is dragging its feet on developing a strategy to solve this problem.

However, according to a briefing note about anti-epileptic drug shortages by the Canadian Epilepsy Alliance, drug manufacturers are not in any rush to address the current shortages, which largely affect lower-cost generic drugs with small profit margins.

The shortage of drugs used to treat epilepsy can have serious consequences that can reduce the quality of life of those with the condition and even put their lives at risk.

Earlier I mentioned that 70% of people—an encouraging statistic—react well to the medication. However, people need to be able to access that medication.

I would also like to talk briefly about some figures. As I said, the unpredictable nature of seizures can put people's lives at risk. Given that epilepsy can lower self-esteem and cause depression or even suicidal thoughts, it is very important that we address this.

Once this bill passes, I hope the Conservatives will go above and beyond the provisions of this bill and implement concrete measures to help people with epilepsy and their loved ones, and to tackle drug shortages. People need their medication. It would be appreciated if the government could show some leadership on this.

• (1210)

A tax credit for family caregivers could also be very worthwhile. As we know, very few measures exist. It would be a small step, and we encourage the government to do more.

[English]

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by commending the member for Halifax West for introducing this important bill, Bill C-278, the purple day act.

The member, as we know, has served his constituents very well over the years, having been an MP for much of the last two decades, and has also had the distinction of serving as a senior member in the federal cabinet of the previous Liberal government.

His efforts here today reflect his passion to make the lives of others better, and his initiative to mark March 26 as a day to create awareness for epilepsy in Canada is welcomed.

It is also heartening to see that the bill appears to have support on both sides of the House and that it will proceed through the normal parliamentary process and receive royal assent in due time. I say this because it is important that this issue not be viewed as a political one, but rather as an opportunity for the House to express an opinion on a matter that affects so many Canadians.

As we have heard from the member for Halifax West, it is motivated by one of his constituents, Cassidy Megan, who chose the colour purple after the international colour for epilepsy, lavender.

The lavender flower, as we may know and as has been mentioned, is a flower that is often associated with solitude, with being alone. It is that feeling of isolation that many people affected by epilepsy and seizure disorders often feel. They often feel that no one understands.

However, we do want to understand. This bill would help.

Epilepsy affects over 300,000 Canadians and over 50 million people worldwide. Many of us here today can only imagine what it must be like to be afflicted with epilepsy. We can only imagine what it must be like to be at work, on a school playground, in a classroom, perhaps on a date, or in any other number of situations when a seizure occurs. We can only imagine what it would be like to be young like Cassidy and looking to obtain a driver's licence, or perhaps wanting to embark on a career in the trades, to operate heavy equipment, to be a medical doctor or a dentist, but being unable to because of the possibility of a seizure and its attendant consequences. A young person's life choices are limited because of this unfortunate condition.

Far too often, people who suffer from epilepsy feel embarrassed and worry what others might think. That is why this bill is important.

Private Members' Business

The bill from the member for Halifax West is designed to create awareness about epilepsy for Canadians like me, who may not fully understand what happens when a person has a seizure and what we can do to perhaps assist when one occurs.

Today is a first step in our efforts to create awareness. We hope that with passage of the bill, each March 26 this House and all Canadians will focus on this important issue.

There is much to be learned. For those watching—and I realize that the member for Halifax West has recounted some of these measures—I wish to point out a few things that one could do to assist someone who is having a seizure. I would like to read them into the record today, because it is important that Canadians have as much information as possible.

If we witness a seizure, we cannot stop it, so please do not try.

People should not shake or hold the person who is having a seizure.

Nothing should be put in the person's mouth. People do not swallow their tongues during seizures. Even trying to give medicine could cause choking.

Something soft, such as a pillow or a rolled-up coat, should be placed under the person's head. This action would help to protect the head from injury.

The person may be rolled onto his or her side to keep the airways clear. Ties or shirt collars should be loosened. Any nearby hazards, such as hot beverages, should be removed.

When the person regains consciousness, he or she may be dazed or tired.

• (1215)

It is important to stay calm, provide reassurance and stay beside the person until he or she feels better again. If the seizure lasts less than five minutes, inquiry should be made about a hospital evaluation.

It is important to call authorities, such as 911, if the following conditions exist: if the person having the seizure is pregnant, injured or a diabetic; if the seizure happens in water; if it lasts longer than five minutes; if a second seizure begins before the person regains consciousness; if the person does not begin breathing normally or does not return to consciousness after the seizure stops; or if this is a first seizure.

I want to thank all organizations and volunteers who work to improve the lives of people who suffer from epilepsy. It is important that we create awareness, and I believe this bill does just that. I am honoured to have had the opportunity to second it and speak to it.

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I also want to thank the member for Halifax West for bringing forward this bill.

It was initiated by Cassidy Megan, a young lady who was seven years old. She must have incredible self-esteem and self-confidence, and I thank her for that.

Private Members' Business

The bill seeks to raise awareness of epilepsy by establishing March 26 as purple day in Canada. On March 26 we can encourage people to wear the colour purple to show their support for people living with this terrible disease.

From the outset, I want to say to the member that we will be supporting the bill.

In the context of the bill, I would like to take a few minutes to tell the House more about epilepsy and the experience of Canadians who live with this condition.

Epilepsy is a chronic neurological disorder. It causes brief recurring seizures. Currently epilepsy affects 1% of Canadians. An estimated 160,000 people are living with this disease.

Every year, approximately 15,000 Canadians learn that they have epilepsy. While epilepsy occurs at all ages, about 60% of new patients are either young children or seniors. The good news is that in about half of the children diagnosed with epilepsy, the seizures will eventually disappear over time.

As the baby boom generation reaches retirement age, the number of epilepsy cases among the elderly, unfortunately, is expected to rise. Brain tumours, head trauma, substance abuse and serious infections are the most common causes of epilepsy. However, often the cause of epilepsy is unknown, leaving patients wondering about the issue.

Although many people living with epilepsy enjoy productive lives, living with this condition presents significant challenges for patients, their families and their society.

Epilepsy can affect participation in key aspects of life. Some of those, such as community, school, employment and leisure have been talked about earlier today. Because of the fear of social stigma, many people suffering with epilepsy are reluctant to admit they have it and seek treatment. As a result, the numbers of Canadians living with epilepsy are likely even greater than originally thought. This is why Cassidy Megan needs to be thanked for her initiative in bringing forward purple day.

There is no cure for epilepsy. At best, medications and other treatments can help manage seizures. Despite advances in diagnosis and treatment, epilepsy is among the least understood of all chronic conditions.

We know that greater awareness and acceptance can help. They can help address the stigma associated with this disease and they can help improve the lives of Canadians who have epilepsy.

Bill C-278 builds on significant efforts already under way to support people living with epilepsy by raising the awareness of all Canadians about this challenging disease.

This year the Minister of Health recognized March as National Epilepsy Month. This gesture was another important step in raising awareness and improving the quality of life of those living with epilepsy across Canada.

In the spirit of Bill C-278, the Government of Canada has been supporting research to improve our understanding of epilepsy. Through the national population study on neurological diseases, the

Government of Canada is working with the major neurological charities, including the Canadian Epilepsy Alliance, to implement a four-year study of Canadians affected by neurological disorders, including epilepsy.

The Canadian Epilepsy Alliance is a nationwide network dedicated to the promotion of independence and quality of life for people with epilepsy and their families through support services, information, advocacy and public awareness.

• (1220)

The Government of Canada provided \$15 million over four years to undertake the study. It is the first ever comprehensive national study on the impacts of neurological conditions on Canadians. It will help us fill gaps in what we know about neurological conditions, including epilepsy. In fact, it is a suite of studies designed to answer important questions that will help us all understand the impact of brain conditions on those living with these diseases, as well their families and caregivers. Teams of researchers across the country are working together to conduct these studies.

While neurological conditions differ in their underlying causes and effects on the brain and nervous system, they share many common features. Whether people are living with epilepsy, Alzheimer's or Parkinson's disease, they face similar challenges in accessing the support they need in order to improve and maintain their quality of life.

This neurological study is exploring the everyday experience of living and managing neurological conditions such as epilepsy. It will improve our knowledge about its prevalence, risk factors, use of health services, economic costs and the impact of neurological diseases, both current and projected, over the next 20 years.

As well, the government has invested in other measures to better understand epilepsy and to fill in the knowledge gaps through research by raising awareness. Raising awareness is exactly what Bill C-278 is about.

Between 2006 and 2010, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, CIHR, invested almost \$40 million into epilepsy research that will deepen our knowledge of the disease. The research will ultimately help build awareness of the impact of genetics on epilepsy, how epilepsy affects brain development, as well as interventions to improve the quality of care and well-being for those living with epilepsy. Overall, research like this will improve our capacity to respond more effectively.

Bill C-278 recognizes that the value of research is key to building awareness through a better understanding of the condition.

The CIHR has two leading institutes that support epilepsy research, the Institute of Neurosciences, Mental Health and Addiction, and the Institute of Human Development, Child and Youth Health. These research institutes engage the research community in the creation of new knowledge and then translate it to inform policies and programs, all with the goal of improving the health of Canadians.

Through the CIHR, the Government of Canada continues to support researchers undertaking epilepsy research at post-secondary institutions across Canada. For example, the University of Toronto's Centre of Research and Neurodegenerative Diseases and McGill University's Montreal Neurological Institute and Hospital.

In June of this year, the CIHR funded the brain connectivity workshop in Montreal to bring together leading experts on brain development, epilepsy and neuroscience. This work will help strengthen the collaboration between Canadian scientists and experts around the world. By working in partnership, we will increase our understanding of epilepsy.

Those are all steps in the right direction. By learning more about the impacts of epilepsy, we will gain reliable information on its effects on us as Canadians. Through knowledge, we can build awareness of this important disease.

Bill C-278 would be another step forward for Canada toward raising awareness of epilepsy. It would be a clear sign of our support for those living with this challenging condition.

• (1225)

[Translation]

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, here on this side of the House, we support the principle of the bill introduced by the hon. member for Halifax West. Given that Canadians with epilepsy still face a great deal of prejudice, parliamentary recognition of a day dedicated to epilepsy awareness represents an excellent initiative. I thank the hon. member for Halifax West and Cassidy Megan, who first suggested declaring such a day back in 2008.

Thus, I support this bill in principle. Unfortunately, as it stands, the bill contains a few translation errors. The most significant error in the bill is the use of the expression "Journée pourpre" in French, when the term recognized by epilepsy advocacy groups in Quebec and the official term used by the Canadian Epilepsy Alliance is "Journée lavande". I will be very happy to propose this amendment once the bill is referred to committee. I would also like to draw the House's attention to the French word "condition" instead of "maladie", as suggested by France Picard, the executive director of the Association québécoise de l'épilepsie.

As I mentioned earlier, I support this bill in principle. We need to raise awareness among Canadians about a condition that affects more than 300,000 people in Canada, including 45,000 in Quebec, along with their families, relatives and friends. Those affected face many myths and prejudices every day. Some of these prejudices are minor but others have more serious consequences. In Montreal, a young woman was fired by her employer after indicating on insurance forms that she has epilepsy. Her employer was unaware that, like two-thirds of those affected by epilepsy, this young woman uses medication to manage her seizures and the likelihood that she will miss work because of seizures is low. This is an example of the type of prejudice that people with epilepsy still have to deal with today. These prejudices have a serious impact on their lives. It would be easy to say that this example is only an anecdote and an isolated incident, but organizations working in this field regularly see such cases.

Private Members' Business

Prejudices against people with epilepsy and the fear of epilepsy create additional obstacles for those living with the condition. As I just mentioned, employment can be affected, although not everyone with epilepsy has been fired or is unemployed. Organizations working in this area have clearly stated that people with epilepsy are more likely to be underemployed or unemployed. Access to education is also an obstacle for some people.

Prejudices cause mental health problems. Rejection by school friends or colleagues due to ignorance about epilepsy affects one's social life, love life and self-confidence. The resulting isolation translates into higher rates of depression and, unfortunately, higher rates of suicide than the Canadian average.

Raising public awareness will definitely have a positive effect on the lives of all Canadians affected by epilepsy. Knowledge can dispel prejudices arising from ignorance. Furthermore, educating health professionals is also desirable and a day of awareness will help.

For certain people with this illness, surgery is the only possible treatment. But there are currently too few specialists who realize that surgery is no longer a last resort for treating epilepsy—far from it, in fact. There is now a tool available to health care professionals that allows them to evaluate whether a patient should be referred for surgery or not. It was created by a team led by Dr. Nathalie Jetté from the University of Calgary. It is available online to all health care professionals. I would like to congratulate them publicly for this tool.

• (1230)

An epilepsy awareness day would educate the public and health care professionals about epilepsy, its consequences and treatments.

For the majority of people with epilepsy, treatment is simple: medication. Medication allows them to live their lives without the perpetual fear of a seizure. Medication also allows them to get a driver's licence and hold down a job.

Right now, a lack of certain medications is threatening to leave many cases of epilepsy untreated. The Canadian Epilepsy Alliance sounded the alarm in October and it was unequivocal: lack of medication can endanger the lives of those with this condition. Lack of medication means that the seizures will start again. Changing medication can also have the same effect.

How can the government see this situation and sit idly by? We need to put words into action. If the House supports this bill—which I hope will be the case—it also has the moral obligation to ensure that those living with epilepsy do not have to deal with additional obstacles due to factors such as the quest for profit or the fact that certain companies are no longer producing less profitable drugs.

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The minister and this government must take immediate action to solve the shortage of anti-epileptic drugs and many other drugs. This government must not allow itself to be fooled by the pharmaceutical industry. It must take action to ensure that all Canadians have access to the drugs prescribed by their health professionals. Furthermore, Canadians have the right to know what measures this government is taking to ensure our drug supply and, if that is not the case, to know why this government feels justified in endangering the lives of thousands of Canadians because of its inaction.

The drug shortage is not a new phenomenon, and this government needs to be accountable and explain why it has not taken any action or any effective measures to resolve this problem.

I truly hope that this bill passes and that March 26 is declared Purple Day. It is important that this House recognize the initiative put forward by a young Canadian, especially since it is already recognized in over 45 countries. I can only hope that this bill will ensure that the Minister of Health pays special attention to this issue and tries to solve the drug shortage. Now would also be a good time to implement some of the measures we suggested during the last election campaign, such as a family caregiver tax benefit, which would certainly help the families of those with more severe cases of epilepsy.

• (1235)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

SENATE REFORM ACT

The House resumed from October 3 consideration of the motion that Bill C-7, An Act respecting the selection of senators and amending the Constitution Act, 1867 in respect of Senate term limits, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it gives me a great deal of pleasure to rise today to speak on behalf of the official opposition and the good people of Vancouver Kingsway regarding C-7, An Act respecting the selection of senators and amending the Constitution Act, 1867 in respect of Senate term limits.

Before I proceed, for Canadians watching, I am one of the men that has a moustache in honour of movement, which is a time when we remember the very real effects of prostate cancer and encourage men across the country to not only get checked but to raise funds to help defeat this disease that has not only taken the lives of many men, but is something that afflicted the past leader of the NDP, the Hon. Jack Layton.

When we talk about the Senate, it conjures up a number of concepts in the minds of most Canadians. Unelected, undemocratic, unaccountable, political patronage and elitist are words that have been cemented in the minds of Canadians whenever they think of the Senate of Canada.

Modern democratic nations do not have representative chambers that are unelected. Modern democratic nations do not have representational chambers that are regionally imbalanced and unequal, with the principle of representation by population being completely ignored and frozen in a time two centuries past. Modern democratic nations do not have representative chambers where a ruling head of state hand-picks legislators who are the head's fundraisers, failed candidates and partisan supporters.

Modern democratic nations do not have representative chambers where people are appointed for life or until they are 75 years old, while the people who senators supposedly represent have no means to remove them. Modern democratic nations do not have representative chambers where the members spend their time campaigning for the ruling party on the public dime on the taxpayer-funded purse. They do not have chambers where unelected, patronage appointed members block legislation passed by a democratically elected chamber.

Modern democracies do not have chambers that restrict membership to those who own property, in the case of Canada \$4,000 in land, and are closed to Canadians who do not. In fact, that is why Canada stands almost alone in the world among modern democratic nations with an anachronism from the past, a sordid past, a shameful history and a dubious future. That is why every province in Canada that had such a body abolished it in 1968.

I want to mention a few facts about the issue of abolishing the Senate.

Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty and Nova Scotia Premier Darrell Dexter have openly called for the abolition of the Senate. The premier of my province, British Columbia, Premier Christy Clark, has said that the Senate no longer plays a useful role in Confederation. Manitoba maintains its position of Senate abolition, although it has plans in place for the contingency that Senate elections are required should this bill be passed. Quebec has called this legislation unconstitutional and has said that it will launch a provincial court appeal if the bill proceeds without the consultation of provinces, which have not occurred to date. So far the bill is opposed by premiers of provinces representing the vast majority of Canadians.

In terms of what Canadians think, public support for a referendum on the Senate is growing. An Angus Reid survey from July, just some months ago, showed 71% of Canadians were in favour of holding a referendum to decide the future of the Senate. Members of the Conservative government stand in the House virtually every day and say that they have received a strong mandate from the Canadian public. They received 39% of the vote in the last election and 61% of Canadians did not support them. They consider 39% of the Canadian public to be a strong mandate. I hope members of the Conservative government recognize that when 71% of Canadians support a referendum on the Senate that is an even stronger mandate.

• (1240)

Thirty-six per cent of Canadians support the abolition of the Senate right now and that is without any kind of public education campaign or national discourse or dialogue, which I am sure would elevate that number to well over 50% very quickly. There have been 13 attempts to reform the Senate since 1900 and all of them have failed.

I want to outline what the bill would do.

The bill would restrict all senators appointed to the Senate after October 14, 2008, to a single nine-year term. It purports to give provinces and territories the opportunity to choose to hold elections at their cost and to determine which names will be submitted to the Prime Minister for his consideration. The bill clearly states that the Prime Minister is not required to appoint anyone so-called elected by the provinces. The bill would not make it mandatory that the Prime Minister would appoint a person so elected. In other words, it does not actually change the way senators are currently appointed, which is that the Prime Minister is free to appoint whomever he or she chooses.

Bill C-7 appears from the outset to be a rather vague and once again confused legislation, which is clumsily attempting to pursue a number of objectives without any clear focus. The reforms outlined in the bill continue the undemocratic nature of the Senate and do not provide, in any way, what Canada needs as a modern democratic nation.

I will go through some of the major flaws in the bill.

When I said that the government had been a little bit confused, previous Conservative bills called for federally-regulated electoral processes. This one calls for provincially-regulated electoral processes. Another bill the Conservatives tabled called for eight-year term limits. This one has nine-year term limits.

The Conservatives have not properly consulted with the provinces about whether they agree with the content of the bill. When the bill was first introduced in June, Conservative senators, even those appointed by the current Prime Minister, pushed back against any plans for Senate term limits, even those who were supposedly appointed after giving their word that they would respect term limits.

The bill would retain the fundamental flaw that senators would remain unaccountable to the Canadian people. By only being allowed to serve one term, senators would never have to face the public to account for the promises they made to get elected or the decisions that they took in the previous nine years. Then they would get a pension for life after they left office. So much for fiscal accountability from the Conservatives.

Having an elected Senate would fundamentally change the nature of politics in Canada. It would create a two-tier Senate where those who were elected likely would feel that they would have more legitimacy. Later in my speech I will talk more about where we run into conflicts with the role and authority of the provinces to speak on behalf of the people in those provinces versus the senators.

Since the Senate has virtually the same powers as the House, an elected Senate would give greater legitimacy for the Senate to introduce legislation or oppose bills sent from the House of

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Commons. We very well could end up with the same kind of gridlock that we see in the United States, and I will talk about that in a few minutes as well.

The safest, the most conservative approach to the Senate is to abolish it. We know how the House of Commons works, but we have no idea what would happen with an elected Senate.

Let us reflect on the history and role of the Senate which originated in the British parliamentary system as the House of Lords. For hundreds of years the so-called upper chamber has been a symbol of nobility and power in place to prevent the commoners in the lower house from affecting the privileged lives of those who enjoy more than their fair share of the product of the nation. Indeed, our own Prime Minister has described the Senate as “a relic of the 19th century”, echoing my view that its presence continues to give merit to an outdated concept.

During the last election, Jack Layton said that something had changed with the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister used to talk about being democratically accountable. He used to talk about things like the Senate being something that had no business opposing or blocking legislation from the House of Commons, where senators who were appointed had no business being patronage appointments.

• (1245)

The Prime Minister has stuffed the Senate with his political friends and with failed candidates. He either allowed or required the unelected senators to block environmental legislation passed democratically in the House of Commons after three readings. It is funny how things change when someone is in power.

The bill would do nothing to address the wider issues around the Senate, that its relevance and role comes from a shameful past of elitism and distrust of the ability of the common people to govern themselves. How else do we explain a requirement that to hold a Senate seat, one must own land? What does that say in 2011, in modern Canada, to all the millions of Canadians who rent or who do not own land? Is it that they are not fit to pass legislation in the Senate of our country? The government does nothing to change that rule.

I said that these reforms were not what Canada needs. This is an important message which must be conveyed to Canadians across the country. We have a tendency in this modern era to hear the word “reform” and automatically assume that this must be a good thing, something that we should greet with open arms. However, just because something represents reform does not necessarily make it good reform. Bill C-7 is not good reform. It represents reform that will make Canada's democracy far less efficient, much less predictable and is much more radical than the government will admit.

By describing the bill as radical, the government has presented it as an evolution of our democratic principles. However, the truth is these reforms would dramatically change the way in which our Parliament operates.

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Bill C-7 is being discussed as simply a method of increasing democratic legitimacy in our system, but in reality it would not do that. In fact, it risks imperilling the very democratic premise it purports to improve. It would result in a complete change in the way our Parliament operates, with a significantly stronger and more active upper chamber. This will undoubtedly create challenges, some of which will undermine the efficiency and effectiveness of government.

By electing the Senate as well as the House of Commons, we will create two parliamentary bodies that both may claim to have a mandate to govern. This is a very dangerous situation for Canada to be in. Parliament would lose the clarity that it currently has regarding where ultimate authority lies, in the democratically elected representatives in the House of Commons.

The importance of clarity in this area is illustrated by events from the last Parliament when my NDP colleague tabled Bill C-311, which was a climate change accountability act. The bill went through all three readings in debate in the House of Commons, went through democratic votes and passed. The bill was then referred to the Senate where the Conservative majority in the Senate, who are not elected by anybody, who are not accountable to anybody, who sit in that chamber for \$135,000 a year until they are 75 years of age, voted to kill that legislation. That is not democratic; it is autocratic.

The 2006 Conservative Party platform stated that, "An unelected Senate should not be able to block the will of the elected House in the 21st century". What kind of hypocrisy is that? The Conservative Party went to the people of the country five years ago and said that its position was the Senate, which is unelected, should not block any parliamentary legislation that had been passed by the House of Commons. Five years later the government caused its Conservative senators to do exactly that. That is not undemocratic. That is hypocritical and unethical. It was a lie and that is wrong.

On these grounds, the actions of the Senate, on those two occasions, were unwarranted and unacceptable. It is our current system that allows us to draw this conclusion. It is clear that in a parliamentary democracy, ultimate authority must lie with the elected chamber and not with the appointed one.

Again, the fact is this bill would muddy those waters. If these reforms were implemented, then the Senate would have every right to throw out a bill that had already passed through the House of Commons as the senators, at least those who had been elected, would have an equal democratic mandate to the members in this place, or may very well claim so.

• (1250)

No clearer indication can be given about the dangers of this kind of system than what we have seen recently in the United States. With the house of representatives and the senate there having equal democratic mandates and being controlled by two separate parties, the world financial markets were almost brought to their knees. Once again, a piece of legislation concerning the debt limit in the United States was raised and the bill to borrow more money to keep the economy going had to be passed. The U.S. Congress had passed similar legislation many times before without a hitch, but on that occasion, the well-being of the American people was firmly put to

one side as the two parties battled it out to achieve their own partisan goals.

This is what the bill risks here. Had one of those two political institutions had the clear authority over the other any chance of this kind of situation developing would be non-existent.

That has been the history of the House of Commons and Senate up to now. The Senate, being unelected, has always by convention refused to exercise its *de jure* powers and instead restricted itself only to holding up legislation, but never to blocking it, until the Conservative government of this Prime Minister came into being.

I would like to raise the issue of the makeup of the Senate going forward if the reform outlined in the bill were implemented. These changes would result in a completely incoherent upper chamber with two tiers of senators. Some would be subject to term limits for nine years and be elected, others would be appointed and could serve until age 75. What kind of message does this send to Canadians, or people all over the world about the reputation of our democratic processes? How can a parliamentary institution operate when one member has a fresh mandate from the electorate, while the person sitting next that member has been there for 25 years with no input from those who his or her decisions affect?

The divisive nature of the reforms also mean that there is a conflict set up between the provinces and the Senate. Which body would truly speak on behalf of the people of that province? I would argue that it is the provincial governments of the country set up by our Constitution that have a legitimate democratic mandate to speak for the people of those provinces, not the Senate, or senators from those provinces, many of whom do not even live in those provinces and have only a very tangential relationship with those provinces.

I know I am running out of time so I want to talk about a couple of quick facts that I think are important; one is money. The Conservative government that has given us a massive \$610 billion debt and the largest deficits in Canadian history still wants to maintain a chamber that costs Canadian taxpayers over \$100 million per year and is undemocratic.

We could abolish the Senate, as the New Democrats have suggested, and save the taxpayers \$100 million a year with absolutely not one iota of deleterious affect on the democratic health of our nation. We could make our government more efficient and more effective. We could be quicker. I have heard members opposite talk about the slow rate with which it passes legislation. They are frustrated by how long it takes to get legislation passed.

By abolishing the Senate we could dispense with three readings and committee study, and speed up legislation, which is what Canadians want in this country, according to the Conservatives.

Why do the Conservatives not abolish the Senate? Why do they tinker around the edges? Why do they continue to take a fundamentally flawed and undemocratic chamber and continue to make it a flawed and undemocratic chamber? It makes no sense.

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I want to talk briefly about the people of Vancouver Kingsway. I come from a riding where David Emerson was elected as a Liberal and two weeks later crossed the floor to sit as a Conservative. The people of Vancouver Kingsway rose up like few citizens, or few ridings, in this country have ever done. They loudly expressed their commitment to democracy in this country because what Mr. Emerson did was a betrayal of democracy.

Here, we are talking about a chamber that is stuffed with failed Conservative candidates, like Yonah Martin, Josée Verner, Fabian Manning, people who ran in elections, placed themselves before the people of the country for their democratic mandate and were rejected, then find themselves appointed by the Prime Minister to the Senate and serve as legislators, even though the people of this country said they did not want to give them their trust or a mandate to do so. That is outrageous. That is an outrage in a democracy, when former fundraisers and failed Conservative candidates end up in the Senate. The Liberals were no better. They did the exact same thing when they were in power.

It is time that people in this country follow the New Democratic lead and abolish the Senate. That is the only responsible, reasonable, democratic measure that can be taken in this country, and I urge all members of the House to do so.

• (1255)

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Vancouver Kingsway for his eloquence in discussing what we believe are the concerns with the Senate.

I have always believed that the Senate has two roles in life. One is to peer review executive legislation from the House of Commons and, because senators do not have a constituency per se, to carry out in-depth studies facing the challenges of our society. For example, the Michael Kirby report on mental health was very good. I thought it was well done.

However, that is not what the Senate has been doing for the longest time. It rubber stamps legislation from the government. Bill C-311 the environmental bill, was passed by this House of Commons and the appointed, unelected Senate, without one witness, killed the bill without a word of debate. After all the work that the elected members of Parliament did to get it through this House and the years it took, for a bunch of unelected, unaccountable people to kill it is not democracy.

I would like my hon. colleague to elaborate on the fact that this is what unelected, unaccountable people can do to override the wishes of the majority of the members of Parliament representing the majority of Canadians.

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, part of the preamble to Bill C-7 states:

—Parliament wishes to maintain the essential characteristics of the Senate within Canada's parliamentary democracy as a chamber of independent, sober second thought—

I am going to focus on the word "independent" for a minute. Everybody knows that the Senate is anything but independent. Both the Liberal and Conservative parties have House leaders and whips

in that House and many senators attend party caucus meetings. To many Canadians, the Senate appears simply to be an extension of this House, an extension of the government controlled by the parties, and largely there to ensure that controversial bills get lost in the system. Partisanship clearly works against this objective of the Senate to be a chamber of sober second thought and these reforms would only serve to make this situation worse.

My hon. colleague brings up a classic example. We do not have to reach back in history 40 or 50 years. We can reach back to the last 24 months to see an example where the Senate was not acting independently but acted on the behest of the government of the day to kill a piece of legislation that it did not like but could not command the majority support of the democratically elected members of Parliament. What we saw on that day, with regard to climate change, was the death of democracy in Canada. That is regrettable and undemocratic.

• (1300)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Questions and comments. My apologies to the hon. member for Winnipeg North. I did not see him the first time.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have had the opportunity to tour the province of Manitoba on a Senate reform committee. It was a committee that was dominated by the New Democratic Party and what we heard time and again was that there is great potential value to a reformed Senate, that we do not have to abolish the Senate, and that there is great value in terms of reforming it.

My NDP colleague in the front row made reference to Michael Kirby's mental health report. I could talk about Sharon Carstairs' palliative care. There are a number of examples that are there where the Senate has provided fine work which has been accepted by provincial jurisdictions and been acknowledged outside of the House, outside of Parliament Hill.

Does the member not recognize that adding value to the Senate is achievable if the political will were there? To abolish it is to wipe out the opportunity to get some gains that we would not be able to achieve, that only an appointed Senate can, such as looking for senators with an expertise to contribute to the many works that could still be done. Yes to reform, but does it have to be abolished?

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, I have a conceptual response for my hon. colleague and a practical one.

The practical one is that, of course, we do not need a Senate. If we were to abolish it, there would be absolutely zero effect on the quality of legislation or study of social issues in this country. The practical evidence is that every single province in the country that had a Senate has abolished it.

For my hon. colleague's question to have logic would be to suggest that every single province in Canada is no longer capable of producing intelligent policy in different areas because they do not have a Senate. I think that is wrong. I think every province in this country is producing policy in all sorts of areas and they do that through democratically elected people.

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Second, on the conceptual front, there is no question that sometimes despots can do good work. There is no question that sometimes autocrats can provide a good study. However, the question here is whether or not the people in the Senate have a democratic mandate to engage in the work that they are doing.

The New Democratic Party believes in democracy. Government legislation and comment on public policy should be made by people who are elected by and accountable to the Canadian public. The fact that an unelected person can sit in the chamber for 35 years and once in a while produce a good report is beside the point.

Of course, my hon. colleague comes from the Liberal Party, which spent decades filling the Senate with its party faithful, bag people and failed candidates, and so I do not expect him to agree with the New Democratic position on that score.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Speaker, rather ironically this is a government piece of legislation, yet I do not see too many Conservative members rising to ask questions or comment on what they call an important piece of legislation.

I do not think anyone in this room has anything against the individuals in the Senate. However, although it would never happen in my lifetime, if the Senate were truly independent of government, with no party caucuses, no party labels, and if we were to have experts in various fields with various backgrounds, we might have had a different reaction from the NDP.

The reality is that the bill would not make the Senate independent of the government, it would make it more dependent. Basically the Prime Minister and the Conservative Party could lose their government tomorrow, but if they stack the Senate with all of their people for x number of years, they would still have control over legislation, and that is simply wrong.

I would like my hon. colleague to elaborate on that, please.

• (1305)

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, that is one of the prime dangers of the bill. Up until now the senators in the other chamber have at least acknowledged that they do not have any democratic legitimacy. Therefore, they do committee work, study bills they hold up, but they would never, up until the current Conservative government of course, actually defeat a bill passed by the House of Commons. However, one of the dangers of the bill is that if they were elected, would they feel they then have the legitimacy to strike down legislation passed in this chamber?

We have not even begun to speak about the regional inequities in the Senate. The composition of the Senate is frozen, in many cases, from 1867. We have tiny provinces that have more seats than provinces 20 times their population; for example, Prince Edward Island compared to British Columbia. It is fundamentally undemocratic to have a handful of people with the same weight as provinces that have many times the population. This is another problem we face. To give democratic legitimacy to a chamber that is horrifically imbalanced from a regional and population point of view is a democratic time bomb. That has not been thought through.

One of the reasons we are not seeing members of the government stand up on the bill is because I think they know this. Many of them were Reform members and I give them credit when, in the 1980s,

they stood up against the Senate. They were appalled at the misuse of the Senate by the previous Liberal governments and wanted it to be reformed in a sincere and democratic manner. If that were to happen, it might be a different story, but that is not what the bill does.

There is only one answer: save \$100 million, make our government more efficient, leaner, more democratic, and get rid of an anachronism that made sense in the 1800s, but makes no sense in a modern democratic nation in the 21st century.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today to Bill C-7, an act respecting the selection of senators and amending the Constitution Act, 1867 in respect of Senate term limits.

Before I continue, I will take a moment to speak to the issue of moverment. Members probably see this sorry scruff on my face. It is an effort to encourage all men to take good care of their health and get their prostate checked out. My father died just over 18 years ago from prostate cancer. He did not live to see his son become an MP. He did not live to see his grandchildren. I am sure all members would agree that these are things that are worth living to see. I would urge, in the most strenuous terms possible, all men to suffer the indignities and get themselves checked out.

I will get back to Bill C-7. It strikes me as strange to have to speak in this chamber to issues so fundamental to our political life in this country that we cherish as a democracy. These issues I am talking about are democracy itself and accountability.

I had the pleasure of studying political theory in university. I had no idea at that time that it would be so relevant to the job of being a member of Parliament. Many people did ask me what the heck I was studying that stuff for, but here we are and I have the opportunity now to speak in this chamber about matters so fundamental that they are matters of political theory.

The government talks so much about Canadian values inside and outside this chamber that one would think there was almost violent agreement on what these things actually are. However, here we are in the House talking about the issue of democracy and a bill that is, frankly, fundamentally undemocratic.

As recently as 2006, our Prime Minister described the Senate as a relic of the 19th century. I would suggest that the Senate, in some important sense, takes us back much farther than the 19th century. It takes us back to a time when democracy in any form and however limited was much distrusted. It takes us back to a time when a ruling class was concerned about losing its social and economic status by way of decisions made by representatives of the people. It takes us back to a time when certain parts of our society were considered to be incapable of and unsuited for making the important decisions of a nation.

What is clear is that this skepticism of democracy is not just an historical tradition. It does not just find expression in our Senate of the 19th century. It is alive today and finds expression in the Conservative government in this 21st century in the form of the bill before us today, Bill C-7. The ancient tradition of distrusting the people survives in the Conservatives.

Bill C-7 clings to the security of a second unelected chamber where progressive legislation, such as the climate change accountability bill and the drugs to Africa bill, legislation that may have moved this country forward in the interests of all its citizens, as well as citizens around the world, can be defeated by the supposed superior wisdom of the present government's, and previous governments, hand-picked, unelected, self-selected watchdogs, not of, but watchdogs against, democracy.

• (1310)

The only thing the bill confirms is the Conservative government's determination to hang onto the reins of power by way of patronage. I would point to the fairly recent, widely-distributed and very instructive letter from a Conservative senator in which he wrote, in part:

Every Senator in this caucus needs to decide where their loyalty should be and must be. The answer is simple; our loyalty is to the man who brought us here, the man who has wanted Senate reform since he entered politics, the [Prime Minister].

With this, we are a long way from the justifications most frequently offered for the existence of this anti-democratic institution. One of those justifications is independence. However, as we have seen, by virtue of that quote, and by virtue of the conduct of this chamber and those in it for well over a century, that it is hardly an independent chamber.

Other justifications have been equally persistent. I refer, in part, to the notion that the Senate is to provide our parliamentary institutions with regional representation. Yet, none of us have ever seen regional interests coalesce and operate to trump partisanship born of patronage in the Senate chamber. In fact, the bill would do nothing to advance or facilitate the emergence of regional interests or expressions in the Senate.

The government is unwilling to surrender its control over Senate appointments, as evidenced by the provision that permits the Prime Minister to reject the outcomes of Senate elections held at the provincial or territorial level; that is to say, the bill would allow the Prime Minister the ability to overrule the democratic will of the regions of this country.

This anti-democratic institution has also survived, cloaked in the justification of a second sober thought and yet all of us in this chamber were sent to this place on the basis of, at least in part, our sobriety of thought.

Therefore, on precisely what democratic principle does one confer in one person elected to this so-called lower chamber the power to overrule the democratic will of Canadians as expressed, at least potentially, in the Senate election and to decide who is wise enough to evaluate and overrule decisions made in this House of Commons?

Further, how grossly exaggerated must one's sense of one's self be to overthrow the results of an election in favour of one's own opinion and judgment, or to believe that he or she is so much wiser than the

collective in this chamber so that he or she must appoint a senator to watch over us? Or, is it not that kind of hubris but simply a blatant disregard and disrespect for democracy that underlies the bill?

Whatever it is, it is clear that this bill would, both in practice and in theory, not only continue the unfortunate tradition of relocating power away from the elected representatives of Canadians and, therefore, the Canadian citizenry itself to an unelected body, but would locate that power in the single person of the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister, like the rest of us in this chamber, submitted himself directly to the judgment of the electorate in but one of 308 ridings. Beyond that, the Prime Minister can claim to have won directly only the confidence of the membership of his own political party as expressed through that party's internal leadership processes. However, that is a far cry from winning the confidence of all Canadians to exercise the kind of power over the rest of us directly elected members of this chamber that the bill would continue to provide to that position.

It has been argued that the bill would move us away from the undemocratic tradition by permitting provincial and territorial elections of a senator. Notably, however, such elections to a federal institution are to be financed by the province or territory. Notably, too, this would not provide the right of the citizens of that province or territory to elect a person to the Senate.

• (1315)

Senators would, under the bill, remain appointed, as the government clings, white knuckles on the reins of power, to its fear of losing control to the will of the people.

This skepticism of democracy is also evident in the very curious nine year term limit imposed on senators. The bill itself provides no rationale for such a length of terms. However, what this seemingly random term does do is effectively frustrate the ability of Canadians to hold senators accountable for their decisions and actions. What is more, with a one year term limit, a senator would never have to answer to voters for decisions he or she made or did not make.

Accountability is a key principle, a foundation of democratic institutions. This chamber is a democratic institution not just because we were elected to this House but because we, should we wish to continue in this position, are held, through the electoral process, to account for our decisions and actions while in this position.

This term, as lengthy as it is, also serves to frustrate the will of this chamber and, in doing so, the will of Canadians. It would provide the government of the day the opportunity to reach into the legislative bodies of this country long after it has lost its own mandate.

Government Orders

Finally, there are a number of questions of critical constitutional importance that are raised but not answered by Bill C-7. What kind of institution is being created in the Senate when some are elected while others will be appointed? Do some of these senators have more authority by virtue of being representatives of the electorate or are all considered to be equal? If the Senate gets filled with elected representatives, what is their relationship and relative authority to those of us in this chamber? Do they retain the same roles that justify those appointed directly, i.e. regional representation, independent sober second thought, et cetera, or is this a new role that they assume as elected representatives? Where there are differences between chambers, how are these resolved in favour of which chamber, or do we anticipate gridlock?

It is long past time for this country to shed the undemocratic traditions of another age, another time. It is time for the parties that have ruled this country to let go of the illogic and, frankly, hypocrisy that the people are good enough to elect us but that only one of us is good enough to appoint someone to watch over us.

It is time to let go of its skepticism of the wisdom of Canadians. It is time for Canada to embrace democracy by abolishing the Senate and allowing those of us sent to this place by the people of Canada to do what they have asked of us and to be turfed out of this place should we fail to do so or should we fail to do so to their standards.

• (1320)

[Translation]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague very much. He is very hard-working and, as we saw from his speech, very intelligent as well. He understands the issues at stake here quite well.

The government boasts that with this bill reforming the Senate the public would be represented more democratically and more accurately. But, according to the existing Senate rules, no one under the age of 30 can become a senator.

Does my colleague think that this kind of limit and the fact that no one under the age of 30 can sit in the other chamber are signs of better democratic legitimacy? There is something I do not understand there, and I would like to hear what my colleague has to say.

[English]

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Mr. Speaker, I will answer that question from my colleague right next door to me in English, if I might. I am trying to learn French from my colleague but we are not quite there yet.

I appreciate the question about youth and those of us in the New Democratic caucus. Some of us at least feel very old relative to some of our colleagues. However, the wonderful thing about democracy is that the will of the people sends to this chamber those who they believe are best able to represent their views in the House.

The bill, should it be amended, should certainly provide the opportunity for all Canadians to send whoever they feel best fit to represent them in the upper chamber.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a fairly straightforward question.

If a majority of Canadians wanted to see the Senate retained, but changed so that there would be more value to it, what would the position of the New Democratic Party then be? Would it still oppose and want to abolish it, even if a majority of Canadians wanted to retain it?

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Mr. Speaker, the question is of a hypothetical nature, but it is the position of the New Democrats that the fate of the Senate should be put by way of referendum to the Canadian people. As we respect the views of Canadians and the principles of democracy, we would obviously abide by the perspective of all Canadians in a referendum on this matter.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, my question is surprisingly similar to that just put by the hon. member for Winnipeg North.

This is a complicated matter. It is not as simple as saying that we do not like the Senate, so we should end it.

We have constitutional issues embedded in how it is structured, and I share the view of the member for Beaches—East York and his caucus that there are significant problems with Bill C-7 as put forward by the government.

Having worked with the Senate over the years, I have seen the Senate take its own initiative and do some very good work, and we have seen examples here this morning. For instance, I point to the decision to not put bovine growth hormone into our milk. That was a done deal until the Senate committee, under Senators Mira Spivak and Eugene Whelan, subpoenaed scientists from Health Canada who were being muzzled and in that way made it possible for the information to get out.

Would the best way forward not be to have a real public consultation on the fundamental problems within our democracy, including the extreme power of the Prime Minister's Office, the lack of sufficient role for individual members of Parliament, the proper balance between the House of Commons and the Senate and the question of whether the Senate should survive or not?

How does the hon. member feel about taking this to the people before we make it legislation?

• (1325)

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Mr. Speaker, as it is a multipartite question, I will approach it this way.

It is clear that good work has come out of the Senate in the past. A recent report about poverty in Canada comes to mind; many worthy recommendations came out of that report.

As my colleague for Vancouver Kingsway said in answering a very similar question previously, this is not an issue of whether the Senate ever does good work or whether senators have worthy opinions on matters of great importance to Canadians.

Government Orders

Like so many issues, this issue is reducible to simple issues. At the beginning of my speech, I spoke to some fundamental principles. That is what we are wrestling with. The fundamental principles are that we have a chamber here in our parliamentary institutions that is undemocratic. It has the power to block legislation. We have seen that happen with some very worthy representation that this elected House passed on to the Senate.

In response, I would say that at times the appropriate approach is to reduce matters to fundamental principles. If we look at an issue in those terms, it often becomes starkly simple. The starkly simple fact is that the upper chamber, the Senate, is not a democratic institution and should therefore be abolished.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, correct me if I am wrong. The government introduced legislation stating that the provinces have to pay for Senate elections and that the provinces have to hold Senate elections. By the way, if only 40% of people vote for MPs, imagine how few people would vote for a senator. Then the Prime Minister can say that the elected senator is not wanted. Only a Conservative can come up with a plan like that. The government is putting forward federal legislation stating that the provinces have to pay for an elected Senate, but when they do elect a senator, the Prime Minister can then refuse their choice.

I would like my hon. colleague to elaborate a bit more on that.

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure what elaboration can follow. It is that simple. I spoke about this fundamental skepticism of democracy that is betrayed in the bill: it talks about an elected Senate, but as I said, the government seems to be hanging onto the reins of power with white knuckles; it is not letting go of this. While the provinces and territories may go through the process at their expense and take this issue and democracy seriously, the government is not surrendering authority to the people and to the provinces to elect members of the upper chamber. Under this bill, it is still an appointed Senate.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on a point that I started to develop, I want to raise the question of who is going to be representative of the provinces.

Currently we elect premiers, cabinets and governments in every province and territory, but the Senate was set up originally as a body to supposedly represent regional concerns. If we were to elect senators from a province such as Prince Edward Island, does the member think this situation could create an unacceptable conflict in terms of who would have the democratic mandate to speak for the people of that province? Would it be the elected senators from that province, or would it be the elected provincial government of that province?

I would also like to ask what my colleague thinks about the judgment of the Prime Minister. Under the bill he would still get to appoint senators; we know the Prime Minister has appointed a number of failed Conservative candidates, so we have some clear examples of the kind of judgment that the Prime Minister exhibits when considering who is appointed to the Senate.

• (1330)

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Mr. Speaker, I spoke earlier about reducing things to fundamental principles and about simplifying

matters, but that question and the previous question make it clear that in trying to amend our Constitution and in trying to change the makeup of the Senate and the process of becoming a senator, one runs into some very complex issues.

One of them is raised by my colleague in his question, which is that we could end up with senators elected from a province who might take positions in conflict with provincial representatives of that province. As well, how elected members of the Senate would resolve differences with elected members of this chamber from that province is certainly unclear. We would be creating a very complicated system, potentially with duelling elected members, so the issue is to abolish the Senate and do away with those complexities entirely.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Winnipeg North.

While Senate reform has been a golden calf of the Reform movement for years, I do not believe any real Reformers would recognize the bill before us today. This bill is wasteful and a clear attempt on the part of Conservatives to distract from the real issues, like jobs and the economy.

What is more unfortunate is that the government will not even approach the issue of democratic reform in an appropriate manner. The Prime Minister and his minister for democratic reform are no doubt aware of the quagmire that is constitutional negotiation, so they are progressing in a haphazard manner, attempting to reform an institution of Parliament by the back door and making change that is not really change. It is like most of what emanates from the government benches: sound and fury.

Regardless of their once ferocious opposition to what they saw as centralizing power in Ottawa, the Prime Minister has changed his spots and is currently acting unilaterally and without proper consultation with the provinces. The changes presented in this bill will foist Senate elections on the provinces, forcing the provinces during a time of economic hardship to fund and administer an additional series of elections without their consent.

This is not surprising, given the single-minded desire of the government to download the costs of an ill-considered and ill-advised justice omnibus bill. It is unfortunate that the government will again increase the financial burden on the provinces. Let us keep in mind that one Ontario provincial election costs taxpayers approximately \$135 million; in this time of financial restraint and instability, the government seems all too keen to saddle the province with yet more costs.

Moreover, this bill is not about real reform. Regardless of its efforts, the government cannot change the appointment process without seven provinces representing 50% of the population agreeing. Ultimately the process of recommending senators for appointment to the Governor General still rests with him.

Government Orders

While the bill provides that a province or territory that enacts electoral legislation that is substantially in accordance with the framework may select its senatorial nominees and submit those nominees to the Prime Minister, the Prime Minister is not even obligated to submit those names to the Governor General, but only to consider them. A prime minister who does not bear the same political stripes as an elected senator is under no compulsion to select that person. This is clearly more waste.

Furthermore, if a province or territory opts out of this expensive and ineffective process, the Prime Minister will nevertheless select his or her own nominee. In essence, this political window dressing will allow the provinces and territories to feel involved, for a price, while in fact it is the status quo that will really be maintained.

More offensively, the bill is another assault on western Canadian provinces. Since deciding to ignore the democratic will of western grain farmers expressed through a plebiscite supporting, by a majority, the single desk marketing and sales arm of the Canadian Wheat Board, the government signalled it was not interested in the voices of western Canadians. It shut down debate and refused to allow enough time in committee to hear from western Canadian farmers, as it was required to do under section 47.1 of the Canadian Wheat Board Act.

This bill, in its present incarnation, places Alberta and British Columbia at a notable disadvantage as well. My esteemed colleague, the hon. member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, is doing a marvellous job explaining the unbalanced distribution of Senate seats. Currently there exists an anomalous gap between the representation of the western provinces in the House of Commons and the Senate. An elected senator will now have an entirely new and very specific constituency to satisfy; it will be difficult for the six elected Alberta senators, for example, to square against the 24 Ontario senators, the 24 Quebec senators, or even the 10 senators from New Brunswick.

Through these measures that dilute the influence of western Canadian provinces, the Prime Minister and his minister appear to have forgotten, likely once getting into government, that the west wanted in when they were young Reformers. Once again, the west is ignored.

● (1335)

The most egregious about-face in this bill is that the horse the government rode in on, the old horse called accountability, seems to have died and the government is dragging it through the streets. Buried in the bill are the surreptitious financial implications found in clause 27 for campaign funding during senatorial elections. In April 2006, the government introduced the Federal Accountability Act to bring forward "specific measures to help strengthen accountability and increase transparency and oversight in government operations". The Prime Minister heralded these measures as an end to the influence of big money in federal political parties by banning union and corporate contributions, as well as limiting individual donations.

Now the government appears to be performing an end run on its financing rules by squeaking in clause 27 of this bill, which would allow campaign funding for senatorial elections to be governed by a provincial legislature. Of course, the rules that govern political

contributions vary greatly depending on the province or territory. There is no continuity.

In this blatant contradiction of the Federal Accountability Act, allowing these laws to govern senatorial campaign funding would in fact perpetuate big money in political parties. Until this bill, senators have been governed by a federal body. Should this bill pass, senators would be governed by 13 different sets of rules and regulations, depending on their province or territory, placing some at a major financial advantage and most in contravention of the Federal Accountability Act.

Take, for instance, a senator from Yukon Territory. Should this bill pass, when the Yukon seat is vacated in 2023, political contributions for the subsequent senatorial election would be governed by the political financing rules of the Yukon territorial legislation. Currently, in Yukon Territory there are no restrictions on how much an individual, corporation, union or entity, whether inside or outside Canada, can donate to a political party.

During the 2006 territorial election, Premier Dennis Fentie and the Yukon Party, formerly the Yukon Progressive Conservative Party, raked in a cool \$114,044 in political contributions during the election, donations like \$7,500 from Seattle's Holland America, or \$5,000 from Trans-Canada Pipelines. The Conservative government had seemingly eliminated contributions from anyone outside Canada, only to now open up the back door through the Senate.

The legislation continues with a vague mention of necessary modifications on campaign funding, but why not be specific right off the bat instead of these cosmetics? These legislative discrepancies create an unequal playing field and are certainly not more effective for both the senators and their provinces. The original intent of the Senate is to achieve a balance of regional interests and to provide a house of sober second thought. That is why we as Canadians have seen doctors, scholars, artists, politicians, community activists, generals and athletes serve our society for the good of the nation through our Senate. We simply cannot maintain a sober second thought in the upper chamber with such unequal and partisan-based governance.

Members opposite may throw around the term "mandate" in response to these allegations, but remember that 39% certainly does not constitute a mandate or majority. Stifling public opinion and this clandestine attempt to circumvent their own political funding rules cannot stand, and the constant attacks on western Canadian provinces and the Canadian Constitution must stop. The Liberal Party will not stand for it. I am sure if members opposite listen very carefully, they will hear the sound of their Reform forebears throwing up their hands in disgust.

● (1340)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member was quite right when he said that jobs and the economy are what are important to Canadians today. There is no doubt about that.

The bill before us tries to provide a bit of hope in terms of democratic reform but in reality that is not the case.

I was living on the Prairies back in the 1990s during the time of the Reform Party. There was a sense of the need to reform the Senate back then. New Democrats were saying that the Senate had to be abolished. The Reform Party wanted an equal, elected and effective Senate. There was an expectation that the Reformers, now known as the Conservatives, were going to make huge gains in terms of achieving a triple-E Senate. Truth be known, the government has failed in its delivery of a triple-E Senate.

There is a great deal of merit in looking at the most effective way for the Senate to operate. There is a great deal of value to the Senate.

I participated in an all-party task force in the province of Manitoba. We toured the entire province, from Flin Flon to Russell to Winnipeg. We listened to many presenters talk about Senate reform. There was no unanimous opinion that it had to be an elected Senate or that it had to be abolished. Many believed there was merit in having an appointed Senate.

It would be wonderful for us to deal with the issue of the Senate in a more open fashion as to what value a reformed Senate could have.

Some New Democratic colleagues have no problem bashing the Senate. They would abolish it, even though the majority of Canadians see the value of the Senate. To say that it is useless and does absolutely nothing is just not fair.

The Senate has done many studies and reports of great value. There was reference to a couple of them in the last hour of debate. There have been reports regarding poverty in Canada, mental health, palliative care. The Senate has taken upon itself to investigate these issues and to provide information and input in terms of government policy, policy which could save millions of dollars.

One concern that was mentioned earlier by a New Democratic member of Parliament was the cost of \$100 million. The NDP has no problem increasing the number of members of Parliament from 308 to 338 which has a substantial cost. Those members thought there should be even more members of Parliament. The cost of the Senate is not necessarily the issue. The bigger issue is the value. There are a great many Canadians who, if provided the opportunity to be representatives in the Senate, could serve our country well.

I have had the opportunity to sit down with Senator Carstairs. I have had the opportunity to listen to other senators present at an all-party committee. What sort of feedback was provided and some of the things that came from the committee can be found in the Manitoba *Hansard*. A Senate page and several senators and lay people participated at the committee. What members of all political parties found was interesting was that there was a sense that the Senate has some value.

● (1345)

Time is a very scarce commodity for parliamentarians. In fact, time management is a very important issue for each and every one of us in the House. The Senate on occasion represents Canada outside Canada and has done notable work on the democracy front. I am aware of some of the efforts Senator Carstairs has been involved in personally as a senator representing Canada. She has gone abroad to

countries like the Philippines on a democracy watch, to look at why some individuals are incarcerated. I have heard many touching stories of how our senators have gone abroad to represent Parliament and Canadians.

Let us look at the types of appointments to the Senate that we have seen in the past. Who would question the appointment of Senator Dallaire? He is an incredible individual who has a great deal to offer in the Senate chamber and in committees. His position as a senator affords better opportunities to travel across Canada and talk about the issues that are important to all Canadians.

There is a great deal of value to the Senate. Some members have said there are premiers and MLAs to ensure that regional interests are being represented. I will use the Canadian Wheat Board as a great example. There are three prairie premiers and I would challenge each and every one of them to come to the House of Commons committees. Where were they on the whole issue of saving the Canadian Wheat Board? There was representation from at least a couple of senators who wanted to deal with this issue. They see it as a regional issue.

I do not have any problem with Senate reform; in fact, I encourage it. Let us recognize that in order to achieve Senate reform we have to look at it in terms of changes to the Constitution. Today, the vast majority of Canadians do not want us to be debating the Constitution and the need for constitutional reform. They want us to be talking about jobs, the economy, health care, and seniors' pensions. Those are the issues they want us to be talking about today.

The government has brought forward a bill. It says it is about democratic reform and that in order to achieve this the provinces are going to have to pay for the election of senators inside each province. In my province and from the task force that I was on, I can tell the government, and it can do its own consultation with the New Democrats and the Conservatives there, the feeling is that Ottawa should be paying for the election of senators.

The government needs to refocus on the whole idea of Senate reform. Today, I think we need to focus on the issues that matter most to Canadians, the issues which I just mentioned.

● (1350)

[Translation]

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to the comments by the member for Winnipeg North.

He spoke a lot about the Senate and about senators. The NDP agrees that some senators do good work; however, we would like to see the institution itself abolished.

In terms of the value of the Senate, does the member think that the Senate is democratic as it is right now, in light of the fact that in November 2010, the Senate simply overturned the climate change bill that was passed by the majority of the House of Commons?

I would like to hear what the member thinks about that.

*Statements by Members**[English]*

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the problem with the New Democrats is they have an issue of consistency and an issue with regard to hypocrisy. At the end of the day, the New Democrats, because they believe they can capture more votes by slamming the Senate, says who cares about the real value of the Senate, that it does not matter. They believe they can score a political votes.

The reality of the situation is, and even one of the member's colleagues earlier today said this, that 35% or 36% of Canadians support abolishing the Senate. However, a majority of Canadians see the value of the Senate, unlike the New Democrats.

We recognize the importance in the role that the Senate can play into the future. We in the Liberal Party are not prepared to write off the future of the Senate because the New Democrats feel that they can score a few political votes as a result of the position they have taken.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when I gave my remarks, my friend heard me reference section 27, which would allow contributions to the Senate campaign to be made in accordance with the laws of the territory or the province. There would be no continuity. Money could come, in many cases, from anyone, any corporation, any organization, even from outside of Canada. I see this as an end run around current campaign contribution law.

Does the member have the same concern as I, that with these kinds of irregularities in the law and no continuity whatsoever, we will be in a perpetual state now of fundraising and spending pre-writ and post-writ throughout the next years following the passage of the legislation, should it pass?

● (1355)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, one of the things that would have to be taken into consideration is this. If we move toward any form of elected Senate and we dissolve the power or the authority to see those senators getting elected to the provinces, there will be a very important aspect in terms of spending limits and the degree to which a senator will be able to receive corporate or union donations. There will be a whole new realm of responsibilities regarding the finances.

The legislation before us does not really touch on that. This is just a thought that the Prime Minister had so he could go back to western Canada and say that the government wanted more democracy and this bill would do that.

The bill falls short by a long shot. If the Prime Minister were legitimately concerned and wanted to make a difference, he would first deal with the most important issues, such as jobs, health care and so forth. However, this will really involve constitutional reform.

[Translation]

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we know that the Conservatives did not consult the provinces to see whether they agreed with the provisions of this bill. In addition, Quebec has called this bill unconstitutional. The provincial government said that it would appeal the matter in court if this bill were passed without prior consultation of the provinces. According to an Angus Reid poll conducted in July 2011, 71% of Canadians are in favour of holding a referendum to decide the future of the Senate.

The NDP thinks that the government should hold a referendum to ask the Canadian public whether it wants to abolish the Senate. Why does the hon. member not agree with that?

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, that is a very good point. In a nutshell, we would have figured the government would have conducted consultations.

With regard to the provinces conducting elections, under the bill that cost would be passed on to the provinces. The provinces would have to come up with the funding.

I was on the task force for the province Manitoba. In the dialogue we had with the Conservatives and the NDP, they insisted that Ottawa should pay for it, not the provinces. We can tell the government really has not done the consultation that one would have expected prior to introducing the bill to the chamber.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask my colleague from Winnipeg to do one thing. He should go to a local tavern, legion or Lions Club in his riding, and without the assistance of Google, a BlackBerry or anything, sit down and ask the first person he sees if he or she can name the senators from Manitoba. I will guarantee, if not set up, the person may get one, if any at all. It shows us that most Canadians have no idea who is in the Senate.

It is not a question of Canadians wanting a Senate like this, they do not understand the Senate. They do not give a second thought to the Senate. For the hon. member to say that the majority of Canadians really want a reformed Senate, I think he has his facts all wrong. I challenge him to do what I have asked him to do and report back his findings to the House.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I invite the member to come to Winnipeg North and we will host a public meeting so he can hear first hand.

I suggest that if he goes into a local legion or a local hall, he will find a good number of people cannot even list their school trustees, their local city councillors or their members of Parliament, which might be a little difficult on our egos.

Generally speaking, we have to cut a little slack, provide a few more facts on the table, approach it with an open mind and see the value that the Senate could contribute in the future. That is the challenge, and I know it is a big challenge for the New Democratic Party.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

● (1400)

[English]

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Dan Albas (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week I was able to visit the great community of Merritt in my riding of Okanagan—Coquihalla. One of my stops was at a construction site for a new silver mine.

I know there are some members of the House who continue to oppose the mining industry at every opportunity. This is a small silver mine that is still required to undergo all the environmental assessment processes required of a large mine. The owners are still required to obtain discharge permits, despite having invested \$3 million in technology to ensure there is no water discharge.

What is exciting is that there are roughly 15 workers, working to assemble \$6 million of new mining equipment. Once this mine is up and running, that workforce will quadruple to over 60 jobs. These jobs pay on average twice as much as the local forestry sector and 30% of those jobs will be filled by first nations. This new mine will inject \$15 million annually into the local Merritt economy.

I ask that all members of the House be mindful that mines create jobs and help to support our rural economies.

* * *

[Translation]

BROSSARD LEGION

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week, we honoured Canadians who have served our country. In my riding of Brossard—La Prairie, I had the honour of attending the activities organized by the Brossard Legion, which celebrated its 60th anniversary on October 22.

Thanks to volunteers like the legion's president, Jean-Guy Lavallière, himself a veteran, the Brossard Legion provides support to the veterans in my riding. I had the privilege of meeting Walter Amos, who served for six years, Roger Robidoux, a Vietnam war veteran, and Raymond Lecours, a veteran of the second world war. Unfortunately, last week, we lost Jacques St-James, a Korean war veteran. We will remember the sacrifices of the families in mourning.

[English]

We will speak up for those who do return, so often scarred by war's traumas. They deserve home care benefits that were promised and to have their pensions paid without unfair clawbacks. Let us salute the fallen by standing up for the living.

Lest we forget.

* * *

VETERANS

Mr. Brad Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week our country honoured its veterans through a week of remembrance. Today, I would like to put a face to that remembrance, the face of my constituent, Nick Sokolan.

Nick was born in 1922 near Wynyard, Saskatchewan. Like many Saskatchewan farm boys, during World War II he volunteered to serve his country. As a member of the Regina Rifles, he landed on Juno Beach and fought in the Battle of Normandy. Nick served with the Rifles, fighting through Belgium and the Netherlands into Germany.

Nick served to the end of the war, only taking a few weeks off to recover from the bullet that struck him in the arm. Returning, he settled in Humboldt, to marry his wife Nettie, to raise four boys and

Statements by Members

work for CP Rail. To this day, he continues to teach young people the meaning of war and the price of peace.

Nick did what many young Canadians of his generation did. They gave above and beyond. They gave for home and country.

On behalf of the House of Commons, we thank Mr. Sokolan and his comrades for all they did on behalf of all Canadians, past, present and future.

* * *

STEEL INDUSTRY

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, representatives of the Canadian Steel Producers Association from across Canada are here today to highlight the importance of their industry.

Steel is integral to Canada's manufacturing sector and our economic future. The industry employs 25,000 Canadians, with 100,000 spinoff jobs. It is essential to our industrial clusters like shipbuilding, automotive, energy and construction.

Today's steel is more efficient, innovative, strong and environmentally sustainable than ever before. Since 2005, Canadian steel companies have invested over \$2 billion in new technologies and manufacturing processes.

I would encourage all members to support a strong future for the steel manufacturing sector in Canada.

* * *

SASKATCHEWAN PARTY

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Premier Brad Wall and the Saskatchewan Party on a historic re-election. Wall and his party received 64% of the popular vote, winning 49 of the 58 seats.

The big spending, high taxing NDP experienced its worst performance ever, relegated to just nine seats. Even the NDP leader was sent packing. He may choose to leave the province, but as we speak more and more of Saskatchewan's kids are returning home to Saskatchewan.

Saskatchewan has experienced a fundamental shift. It has rejected an era of confrontation and defeatism in favour of one of co-operation and prosperity. It has become a proud "have" province, contributing to Canada. The media contrived orange crush was handed a crushing defeat and Saskatchewan and Canada are better for it.

I would like to congratulate my local MLAs Darryl, Kevin, Delbert, Scott, Fred, Nadine and Victoria on their electoral success.

Statements by Members

● (1405)

JENNA MORRISON

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this morning, I joined hundreds of cyclists and other community members at the corner of Sterling and Dundas Streets in the west end of Toronto. It was there, on November 7, that Jenna Morrison, who was cycling to pick up her five-year-old son, died under the back wheels of a truck.

We came together this morning to express our condolences to Jenna's family and to grieve. The shock of Jenna's loss is very difficult to accept. A ghost bike was installed on that corner today, another one of the all too many reminders of cyclists killed on our city streets.

Making our streets safe requires governments at all levels to act. This afternoon I will join my colleague from Trinity—Spadina to second her bill that would require side guards on trucks to prevent deaths like Jenna Morrison's death.

I urge my colleagues here in Ottawa to do their part by quickly adopting this bill. Lives depend on it.

FIFTY YEARS OF PRIESTHOOD

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Father Mike McCaffery who recently celebrated 50 years of priesthood. Father Mike entered the seminary after attending a meeting with Father Bill Irwin who was himself then recently ordained and became the founder of Catholic Social Services.

His life's work is vast and varied and includes serving in a number of parishes, as well as a year with the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops in Ottawa and another year for the British Columbia Alcohol and Drug Commission.

Father Mike's academic life includes a master's degree in sociology from New York, studying pastoral theology and counseling at Notre Dame University and being president of Newman Theological College for six years.

He was the rector of St. Joseph's Basilica and, during his time there, presided over the wedding of Wayne and Janet Gretzky, an event that he says made him famous for five seconds.

Father Mike is known and loved around Edmonton for his sense of humour, his love of golf, his strong attachment to family and friends, his fondness for all things Irish and his efforts to be respectful toward others and inclusive of all.

We thank Father Mike for his 50 years of service to God and to our community. God Bless him.

REMEMBRANCE DAY

Mr. Parm Gill (Brampton—Springdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to share with the House my incredible experience during Remembrance Day. At times, I think we are all prone to taking our country for granted, however, this was not the case on Friday.

I had the honour of attending the Remembrance Day parade organized by the city of Brampton and Branches 609 and 15 of the Royal Canadian Legion. Thousands of citizens lined the streets to pay tribute to our brave men and women in uniform.

In Brampton, there was a renewed sense of pride fuelled by a growing understanding and appreciation for the sacrifices made by our veterans.

We are very fortunate to live in one of the most prosperous, safest and accommodating countries in the world. Being part of this Remembrance Day ceremony was another reminder that Canadians will never forget those who gave their lives and those who continue to give their lives for our freedom.

*[Translation]***DEMOCRACY**

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I crisscrossed my riding over the past two weeks to attend the Remembrance Day ceremonies being held across my riding.

In Stanstead, Sawyerville, Weedon, Coaticook and North Hatley, to name just a few locations, I met men and women from the Royal Canadian Legion who, for decades, have carried on the memory of all fallen soldiers. Let us never forget that our troops came home with powerful memories and left behind the brothers and sisters who gave their lives to defend our rights and freedoms.

However, the democracy so dearly defended by our country in conflicts since the first world war no longer seems to concern the men and women of today. In fact, although 61% of Canadians did not vote for the current government, and despite its regressive social and economic policies, people seem to be quite stoic and passive about it all. The government refuses to debate the important issues that will have a profound effect on the future of our country.

Nevertheless, I will hold high the torch of freedom and democracy in tribute to all those—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke.

*[English]***CFB PETAWAWA**

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the most recent national Communities in Bloom competition between Canadian military bases, this year the best base in Canada goes to CFB Petawawa.

This reconfirms what we in the upper Ottawa valley already know. The Canadian Forces Base Petawawa is tops as a beautiful place to call home, as well as a great place to serve our country in Canada's armed forces.

Canadians know CFB Petawawa as one of the busiest operational army bases in Canada, more than pulling its weight during the recent mission in Afghanistan. Soldiers know that when it comes to keeping the home fires burning, our local community is there.

We mourn the loss of those who did not return from the great wars of the last century. We remember a different generation in conflicts like Korea, Cyprus, Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan.

In Petawawa, every day is red Friday. We welcome our troops home to the prettiest base in Canada.

* * *

● (1410)

[Translation]

CANADARM

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today, I invite my colleagues to celebrate with me the 30th anniversary of the Canadarm, which is an enduring example of Canadian innovation and know-how in space. The strength and versatility of the Canadarm illustrate the infinite potential for innovation in Canada. Overseen by the National Research Council of Canada, hundreds of our best minds spent an entire decade working on this monumental task. Together, they created this robotic technology capable of withstanding the most extreme weather and even moving a bus full of passengers. Since its debut, the Canadarm has logged more than 100 missions with space shuttles.

The NDP is 100% behind our Canadian scientists and engineers, who have shown that Canada's reach extends not only throughout the world but also into space and that the only limits on our innovation are the ones we create.

* * *

NATIONAL ADDICTIONS AWARENESS WEEK

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to draw attention to National Addictions Awareness Week, which is currently being observed throughout Canada. An increasing number of Canadians are suffering from addictions, which have devastating consequences for the individuals and their friends and families.

I would like to talk about the Portage organization, which has 10 centres across Canada. Since its establishment in 1970, Portage has helped tens of thousands of people to take back control of their lives through different programs. Recently, Portage acknowledged the success of almost 350 people in Quebec who completed its program or maintained a positive, drug-free lifestyle for one year.

I want to congratulate them. Their determination is proof that, with the necessary help, it is possible to overcome the demons of drug addiction. Kudos also to the entire Portage team for its contribution to Canadian society.

* * *

CANADARM

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the International Space Station would not exist today without a significant contribution made by Canada. Of course, I am referring to the robotics used to assemble the station. Canada is famous for its expertise in space robotics, in particular the Canadarm, which is turning 30 this week.

Statements by Members

[English]

I had the privilege and the pleasure of operating the Canadarm on two shuttle missions, once to capture a satellite and once to add a very large piece to the space station. I cannot tell members the pride I felt but I know that all Canadians felt the same pride watching this exquisitely precise performance of this incredible technology.

Everyone was nervous when it first flew 30 years ago. Designed and tested in gravity, would it work in weightlessness? They need not have worried. It behaved flawlessly from the very beginning of its long and distinguished life.

Let us all honour those very clever Canadians who designed and built the Canadarm.

* * *

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Wheat Board chairman, Allen Oberg, and his seven directors continue to push their irresponsible, scorched earth policy.

Early reports suggest that their most recent ad campaign is already costing western Canadian grain farmers a whopping \$1.4 million. This is in addition to the \$100,000 they are spending on a reckless and baseless lawsuit in an attempt to keep their draconian monopoly.

Mr. Oberg is doing a great disservice to the farmers and staff he claims to represent by refusing to work with us to give the Canadian Wheat Board the best chance to succeed in an open market.

Not only does Parliament have the right to change legislation, our government has a responsibility to deliver on the promises we made to Canadians. By playing fast and loose with farmers' hard-earned dollars, Mr. Oberg is highlighting the need for Bill C-18 to be passed by this House as soon as possible.

While Mr. Oberg and other directors choose to punish farmers based upon their province of residence, our government will ensure western Canadian grain farmers receive the marketing freedom they want and justly deserve.

* * *

● (1415)

[Translation]

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative Party is guilty of breaking the law. It is guilty of election fraud to the tune of \$1.3 million. But under the agreement that was negotiated, two Conservative senators and two high-ranking Conservatives will avoid trial and potential prison time. Since the charges were laid against high-ranking Conservatives, the provinces will not have to foot the bill for costly trials and prison stays. Yes, the Conservative Party is guilty.

[English]

It is reminiscent of when the Minister of Public Safety pleaded guilty to breaking election laws but managed to avoid trial and potential prison time.

Oral Questions

For any other Canadian, the rules are clear: if one does the crime, one does the time. However, if the person is a Conservative insider and he or she does the crime, the Conservatives will pay the fine. It is shameful and just more proof that, under the Conservatives, friends and insiders get all the breaks while Canadian families get left behind.

* * *

NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Jay Aspin (Nipissing—Timiskaming, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP is disunited on fairness of the shipbuilding process, merit-based selection of Supreme Court judges and marketing freedom for western Canadian farmers. A leadership candidate proposes mergers with the Liberals. Another leadership candidate disagrees with the NDP's constitutional position and the placeholder leader changed the NDP's long-standing position on democratic representation.

When two Thunder Bay NDP MPs voted to end the ineffective and wasteful long gun registry, their placeholder leader took harsh disciplinary measures to silence them.

The Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters called these disgraceful actions "an affront to the parliamentary system".

The NDP punishes MPs who speak for their constituents while it rewards MPs who break their word.

This is yet another worrying example that the ineffective, disunited NDP is not fit to govern.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, until now Canada has been excluded from the trans-Pacific partnership trade talks largely because of our insistence on protecting our dairy and poultry industries.

The Prime Minister has a poor record as a negotiator, but now he says that the United States wants us in the talks.

I would like to know, what has changed? What will Canada give up in order to be allowed into the trans-Pacific partnership trade talks?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have formally expressed an interest in our willingness to work with the trans-Pacific partnership.

Having said that, all countries approach these negotiations with a view to protecting their interests, as Canada certainly will. Therefore, Canada's approach to the TPP will not be different with respect to the European Union free trade negotiations. Of course, this includes our interest in defending and promoting our specific interests in the economy, including supply management.

[Translation]

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, any trade agreement must first and foremost help to develop our communities, particularly communities that depend on agricul-

ture. In June, the government was very clear: it was going to defend the supply management program.

The question now is: will the Conservatives take the same approach that they used with the Canadian Wheat Board and try to do away with the supply management program for poultry, eggs and dairy products?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, we have been clear: Canada's approach will not be different in these negotiations from its approach in the European Union negotiations. I repeat: we have officially expressed our willingness to work with the trans-Pacific partnership, but all countries approach these negotiations with a view to protecting their interests.

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in this time of economic crisis, improving trade with the APEC countries must be a priority, but the Conservatives must not repeat the mistakes of the past. Canada must insist that strict environmental standards, respect for human rights—which is a priority—and respect for workers' rights be central to any new trade agreement.

Given the Conservatives' track record in this regard, what assurance can the government give that the trans-Pacific partnership will make these rights a top priority?

• (1420)

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is clear. Each time, our country has protected the interests of Canadians. Our Conservative government is concentrating on job creation for Canadians and on economic growth. That is our government's priority.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 72,000 Canadians lost a full-time job last month. The Minister of Finance reacted by increasing employment insurance premiums.

Families are unable to pay their bills now. It is not reasonable or smart to eat into the paycheques of workers in the middle of an economic crisis while lowering the taxes of large corporations.

Why is this government insisting on dipping into the pockets of Canadians rather than helping them to find work? Canadians want jobs, and the government should be working to find jobs for Canadians.

[English]

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I guess that outlines the difference between this government and the NDP. We recognized a long time ago that Canadians want jobs. That is why we put in place an economic action plan that actually placed jobs in front of Canadians. We put stimulus money into the economy that helped provide jobs and infrastructure.

However, every time we bring something forward that helps the unemployed; for example, extending EI, the NDP votes against it. The EI hiring credit in the last budget, the NDP voted against that as well.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it looks like the Conservatives have not even seen the most recent job figures: 72,000 full-time jobs evaporated last month because of Conservative inaction. Also, they have blown their own deficit forecast yet again. The government has no plans to create jobs. It sounds an awful lot like a repeat of 2008 to me. That means Canadian families are going to pay the price.

The question is very simple. When will the out of touch government get to work, so that Canadians can get back to work? We lost 72,000 jobs last month. Get to work.

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wish that hon. member would have shown the same passion and voted with the last three budgets that actually put in place something that helped Canadians.

It is a little late to the game to say that we should do something about increasing Canadian jobs. Our economic action plan did just that.

There are 600,000 more Canadians working today than there were at the end of the recession and 8% of those are full-time jobs. That matters to those people.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of National Defence.

A question has arisen with respect to the employment insurance decision by the government to raise employment insurance premiums by some \$600 million next year in defiance of the reality that, in fact, the economy has been losing jobs recently and that the economy is definitely slowing down.

When we asked the Minister of Finance this question over many, many months, he kept saying that he had no authority or power over these increases.

Why did the government not go all the way and stop the increases as of January 1, 2012?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, we have taken a number of steps to address the issues regarding the economy, particularly those with respect to employment insurance.

Our government's top priority remains getting Canadians back to work. That is exactly what we are doing. We are working to promote economic growth.

I do not know whether the hon. member heard or not but we have actually made announcements very much specifically dedicated to that effort. We are committed to providing timely service to all Canadians who do need that service.

That is what our minister has been doing. That is what our government's policy puts forward for the country.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the fact remains that the Conservative government decided to increase taxes on workers and employers just as the economy is slowing down. It does not make any sense. No economist or theorist in the country would agree with such an approach.

The government has shown that it can cut tax increases by 50%. Why does the government not go all out and say that there will be no tax increases this year?

● (1425)

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member has a point. Clearly, Canada is not immune to the global fluctuations that are occurring, especially with what we see happening in Europe. Of course, the European markets and what has happened in the United States definitely impact us.

I will say what the government will not do. It will not do what the member's party did when it had a surplus in the EI fund, which was to expropriate and actually steal that money to use it for another purpose.

I assure the House our government will not follow that example.

* * *

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on another subject to the same minister.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Toronto Centre has the floor.

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Speaker, there is no point in trying to respond to that. This is on another question.

There was a third allegation today with respect to an RCMP officer in Alberta regarding a question of harassment. We have two serious allegations of harassment by two women in British Columbia.

It is clear from the allegations that have been made that this is now a systemic issue. It is not just one officer complaining; it is clearly a number of officers complaining, and others feeling that they are not able to come forward because of a systemic problem.

I ask the minister, what does the government intend to do to deal with an issue that is no longer one by one, but is clearly now a systemic issue in our national police force?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, like the interim leader of the Liberal Party, we in the government are very concerned about these reports. In fact, we expect that the new RCMP commissioner will be seized with this issue immediately.

I am assured by the Minister of Public Safety that this will be on the agenda the very first time he meets with that new commissioner, when that position is filled.

Oral Questions

The government's policy, including the RCMP of course, is one of zero tolerance with respect to harassment in the workplace. That is expected of every department, particularly the RCMP.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the United States have chosen the right approach by wanting to ensure that the Keystone XL project respects the environment. However, the Conservatives refuse to adopt an action plan to respect the environment. Rather than sitting down with the Americans to see how to do things better, the government insists on going forward.

Will this government recognize that its inaction is harmful to our environment and to our jobs?

[English]

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an important objective of our government to diversify the market for our resources, which is why I visited China and Japan last week where there was an excellent reception.

The NDP has obviously not talked to Joseph Mancinelli of the Labourers' International Union of North America. Joe supports the XL pipeline because it would create jobs for his members.

When will the NDP stop supporting jet-setting Hollywood actors and European—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Halifax.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Wow, Mr. Speaker.

Make no mistake, the Keystone decision is the result of six years of Conservative inaction. The Americans are outspending us 18 to 1 on renewable investments and 8 to 1 on clean energy. Instead of lobbying the U.S., why do we not look to it for an example? We should be creating jobs by diversifying our energy economy.

The government is refusing to show leadership on climate change and the economy. When will it wake up and work with the Americans to help us build a green energy economy?

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, NDP members have never met a job creating private sector policy or project that they do not want to kill, a tax they do not want to raise, a regulation they do not want to impose, a freedom they do not want to curtail, an issue they do not try to use to divide Canadians, and a fictitious problem they do not want the government to solve at great cost.

That is why the NDP is not fit to govern.

* * *

• (1430)

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, those answers clearly indicate how out of touch the Conservative government is.

Our biggest trading partners are concerned about exports of oil sands bitumen because Conservatives failed to listen to sensible

health and climate concerns. The Prime Minister called this a no-brainer. The Americans and the Europeans call it a non-starter.

Will the government listen to the legitimate concerns of our trading partners instead of just threatening the Americans with taking our oil to China?

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we were disappointed with the delay in the Keystone pipeline which obviously results from U.S. domestic political considerations. We have consistently said the pipeline would create thousands of jobs in Canada and billions of dollars in economic activity.

While we remain hopeful the project will eventually be decided on its merits, we will continue to ensure that markets are open outside North America.

On my trip to Asia, the reception was—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Nickel Belt.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): It must have been a really good reception, Mr. Speaker.

[Translation]

It is clear that Europe and the United States do not want our oil, but the government says that that is no problem and that it will sell our oil elsewhere, and why not to China. This government has no vision for our economy and is putting all its eggs in one basket.

Instead of selling raw bitumen to China, why does this government not find ways to refine Canadian oil here in Canada?

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member does not understand that Canada does not have the oil refining capacity and that it costs billions of dollars. When I visited China and Japan, the reception was very good. Canada has an excellent reputation. That is why they want to continue to invest in Canada. They are very interested in our natural resources.

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[English]

PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY TO THE PRIME MINISTER

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the past month the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister has been called out by the Canadian judiciary, the Ethics Commissioner, the bar association, but now the senior law clerk of the House of Commons is warning that his behaviour at committee is an interference with the independence of the courts that is both unconstitutional and "unlawful". Either the government respects the constitutional limits of Parliament or it does not.

I have a simple question. Will the government rein in this rogue member, yes or no?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government and the member for Peterborough were elected to look out for taxpayers. That is what he has been doing. He deserves the applause of the House on all sides for standing up for taxpayers. That is what he has done.

The CBC receives a lot of money from taxpayers. Our government believes that the CBC, the Wheat Board, and other organizations, have to be accountable for the money they receive from taxpayers. That is what the member for Peterborough has been fighting for. That is what we will continue to pursue with all government departments and agencies, including the CBC.

[Translation]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are talking about interfering in the independence of the courts. The parliamentary law clerk clearly said that the member for Peterborough violated Parliament's constitutional boundaries. He is turning the committee into a circus and his request for documents is unlawful.

Is the attack on the CBC also an attack on the independence of Canadian courts?

• (1435)

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are talking here about accountability and the responsibility of the CBC to be in tune with its needs and to be open to the public about the money it receives from taxpayers.

That is what the Parliamentary Secretary is doing and that is what our government promised to Canadians during the last election campaign. We are asking for the CBC's receipts because it must be accountable. It was the same with our Bill C-2, under the former government. The CBC must show taxpayers that it will act responsibly with the money it receives from them.

* * *

[English]

CAMPAIGN FINANCING

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week the Conservative Party of Canada pleaded guilty to exceeding campaign spending limits, failing to report election expenses, and violating the Canada Elections Act. Despite being found guilty, the Conservatives are calling it a victory. Plea bargaining and paying the maximum possible fines so that Conservative Party operatives do not get thrown into prison is not vindication. It is contemptible.

When will the government stand up for election spending rules and get tough on the rule breakers in the Conservative Party?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a document from Elections Canada which says:

The Contracting Party acknowledged acts that contravene section 405.21 and constitute an offence under paragraph 497...of the Canada Elections Act.

Oral Questions

The contracting party in this Elections Canada document is the New Democratic Party of Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, anyone can see the difference between trying to respect a man's final wishes and trying to steal an election, as the Conservative Party did in 2006.

On August 30, the Privy Council summoned 200 civil servants to a meeting, supposedly to talk about budget cuts. But when they arrived, surprise, they found out it was a party organized to say goodbye to Dimitri Soudas, the Prime Minister's former director of communications.

Is this government capable of making the distinction between the public service and partisan politics?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member had the opportunity to apologize on behalf of his party for not complying with the Canada Elections Act. In the document I have here, the New Democratic Party admitted to breaking the law. There is good news for the Conservative Party: all of the Conservatives who were accused were cleared following the agreement that was reached last week.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, not only do the Conservatives do as they please with the public service, as we have seen in the past, but now they are also using Parliament Hill as a private meeting room to honour party insiders or to organize an event for the Conservative Albany Club. And who will be the next guest of honour? The person responsible for cutting \$4 billion in public services, the President of the Treasury Board. It makes no sense, it oversteps all boundaries, when members use Parliament to raise money for party insiders.

Why do the Conservatives continue to believe that they do not have to follow the same rules as all other Canadians?

[English]

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am glad the hon. member raised the issue of the Albany Club because I would like to make a bit of an advertisement for the NDP. Apparently there is a fundraising party for one of the NDP's leadership candidates, Mr. Topp, at the Albany Club. I guess it is okay for New Democrats to use the Albany Club, but not for us.

Having said that, I would be happy to refer this matter to the Ethics Commissioner.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is running out of ways to hide his famed allegiance to supply management while he paints himself into a corner.

Oral Questions

Despite recent assurances, this weekend the Prime Minister announced his desire for membership in the trans-Pacific partnership, an organization which has been clear in its opposition to our valuable supply management system.

In light of this announcement, I have a simple question for the government. Has it put the elimination of supply management on the table in exchange for membership in the trans-Pacific partnership, yes or no?

● (1440)

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): First, Mr. Speaker, I totally reject the premise of that question, but I will confirm that we have expressed formally our willingness to join the trans-Pacific partnership.

All countries approach negotiations with a view to protecting their interests. Canada's approach to the trans-Pacific partnership will not be different in this regard. It will be no different from our negotiations with the European Union.

However, I would make it clear that we will continue to defend supply management as we always have.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government's answer to that last question is shallow indeed. Almost weekly, the U.S. surprises the minister with new fees or restrictions on Canadian business. Now, as a precondition to our joining TPP discussions, the U.S. is targeting supply management.

On Saturday, the minister said the government did not see any reason to join the talks, and 24 hours later the Prime Minister was compromising supply management just to get to the table.

Will the minister explain how an individual defends something the government is prepared to give away just to get in the room?

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hyperbole opposite is absolutely incredible and amazing.

It is obvious to me that neither the member nor his party has read the throne speech, because in the throne speech we defended our position on supply management.

Once again, our position on supply management has not prevented us from signing trade agreements with a number of countries around the globe. Our position on supply management has been clear. We defend it and it is good for Canadian farmers.

* * *

CAMPAIGN FINANCING

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, just to revisit the issue, last week the Conservatives finally pleaded guilty to breaking the Canada Elections Act with their in and out scam. They have been hit with the highest fines possible, breaking two counts of the law, yet what we get is a stupid response from the parliamentary secretary speaking of—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. I think the member was referring to the quality of the response. It certainly is provoking a little disorder, so I would ask him to phrase his question carefully. The hon. member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor.

Mr. Scott Simms: My apologies, Mr. Speaker. Provocation is not really my thing, but nonetheless I will continue.

This is an absolutely ridiculous remark. Are members ready for this? He called it, after pleading guilty, a big victory. When he gets thrown in jail, will he call that a small victory, perhaps?

The question remains, how many millions in tax dollars has the government had to shell out to fight the Conservative Party's stonewalling and its clearly baseless lawsuit against Elections Canada?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are schoolchildren here watching us today. They have been told by some of their teachers that there is no such thing as a stupid question. We do not want them to leave here feeling disabused of that point of view.

The Conservative Party did experience a big victory last week when every single Conservative accused of wrongdoing was cleared.

* * *

[Translation]

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are hearing more and more stories like that of Catherine Galliford, an RCMP corporal in British Columbia who was sexually harassed in the workplace for 20 years. How is this zero tolerance?

Corporal Galliford has been off work for the past four years as a result of the harassment she endured.

Will the government commit to dedicating all the resources necessary to supporting Corporal Galliford and other victims of sexual harassment in the workplace?

● (1445)

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very concerned about these very troubling reports. We expect all members of the RCMP to carry out their duties with integrity and professionalism. Our government is committed to providing all women in the RCMP a workplace free of sexual harassment. I will be raising this issue with the new commissioner very shortly.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that answer shows that they have been asleep at the wheel. Every day more female officers are coming forward with stories of systemic sexual harassment at the RCMP. It has become so bad that a former RCMP spokesperson says she would not recommend any women opt for a career in the RCMP. If women complain, they get blacklisted. Their only way out is to take sick leave. The harassment complaint procedure is not working in the RCMP.

When will the government act to ensure that Canadian women can safely enter a career in the RCMP?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am extremely concerned about these troubling reports. We expect that all members of the RCMP carry out their duties with integrity and professionalism. Our government is committed to providing all women, and indeed all men, in the RCMP a workplace free of harassment, sexual or otherwise. I will be raising this with the new commissioner very shortly.

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PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week, we learned just how badly the government is failing families living along our coastlines. Despite years of warnings, the government has not done a single review of whether the RCMP has what it needs to keep our ports safe. There is no national strategy. No one knows if the RCMP fleet is even strong enough.

Does the government's so-called tough on crime agenda include ignoring port safety? Why is it failing to protect families along the coastlines?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is good to see that the New Democratic Party has actually developed an interest in the RCMP. The member's party has consistently voted against giving the RCMP, and all police officers, the tools they need to do their job. I hope that this is a sign that the NDP will finally start standing up for law enforcement officials, the RCMP, municipal or otherwise.

[Translation]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police is not even aware of the condition of its fleet, yet the government would have us believe that the RCMP is capable of protecting our ports. This government boasts about being tough on criminals, yet it cannot give the RCMP the resources needed to maintain its vessels.

When will this government decide to take action to ensure that the RCMP has the tools it needs to carry out its mandate, which is to keep Canadian families safe?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this appears to be a trend. There are now two members of the NDP who are interested in the RCMP. The member's party has consistently voted against giving the RCMP and all other police officers the tools they need to do their job.

I would call on the NDP to continue with this expression of concern so that we can work together and actually help police officers instead of helping criminals the way the NDP usually does.

* * *

INDUSTRY

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the House knows, Canada's small businesses are the backbone of our economy and a source of good, well-paying jobs for people all across the country. That is why I was so pleased today to see the Minister of Industry announce an \$80

million investment over the next three years to help these businesses adopt new forms of information and communications technologies, thereby helping them grow and become stronger.

Would the minister tell us what good things he sees coming out of today's announcement?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government's number one priority is the economy. I was proud to announce this morning more than \$80 million toward the strengthening of our small and medium-sized business sectors. This funding will help more than 600 Canadian businesses to adopt new information technologies and new ways of doing business in our digital economy.

[Translation]

This \$80-million investment will help our small and medium-sized businesses, 600 of which can use this investment to adapt to new technology, become more profitable, hire workers and take advantage of the digital economy.

● (1450)

[English]

With steps like this, Canada will lead the way.

* * *

[Translation]

HIGHWAY SAFETY

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Montrealers are worried about the Mount Royal Tunnel. There are no emergency exits, and two reports indicate that the tunnel does not meet fire safety standards and that it is impossible to make old tunnels compliant with current standards. Yet the commuter train travels through this tunnel every day.

Does the government consider the Mount Royal Tunnel to be safe?

[English]

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government has confidence that the tunnel is safe. We look forward to working with our partners to ensure that the safety of federally-owned assets are secure.

If the member is serious about safety, I wonder why his party voted against all the investments we have made in the infrastructure for the transportation around Montreal. The NDP has voted against every budget. If it were serious, it would support this government.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government should stop backing away from its responsibilities. The fact is that the licence to use the tunnel is given by Transport Canada. Do Montrealers not deserve to know if this tunnel is safe? In New York, hundreds of millions of dollars have been invested to make tunnels safer. Is the government waiting for a fire or disaster before taking action?

Oral Questions

Will the government take up its responsibility to protect public safety and act on this issue?

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the suggestion made by the NDP member that the government does not take safety seriously is very disappointing. If the member were serious about improving safety, he would work with the government and help us make the investments necessary, as we have done in the budgets of 2009, 2010 and 2011. It is very unfortunate and disingenuous of the NDP to stand and raise this issue when it has voted against the government every time we try to make the situation better.

* * *

AVIATION SAFETY

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' reckless hands-off approach to aviation safety is putting Canadians at risk. Crashes in the north have cast a light on the problems with safety inspections. In my region, prairies and north, we are supposed to have 106 operational inspectors but we only have 74. In other regions, over one-third of the inspectors are missing and yet we allow airlines to regulate themselves, with no hands-on federal oversight.

Will the Conservatives take the safety of Canadian families seriously and hire the safety inspectors we need for Canada's aviation industry?

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government takes the safety of Canadians when flying very seriously. The CBC report, to which the member referred, has its facts wrong. We do not allow airlines to regulate their own compliance with safety regulations. We have a safety management system that is the world standard now. Canada was the leader and we will continue to be the leader in aviation safety.

Again, if the NDP were serious, it would support this government and not scare Canadians about flying. Flying is the safest way of travel and it is partly because this government makes it so.

[Translation]

Ms. Isabelle Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is simply not enough. The safety management system was supposed to be implemented under the supervision of federal inspectors. However, former aviation inspectors are saying that Transport Canada has lost track of which companies have problems to rectify. Just in northern Canada and the Atlantic provinces, there is a shortfall of 51 inspectors.

When will the Conservatives stop putting Canadians at risk and start hiring the inspectors we need?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the safety of Canadians is an absolute priority for our government. The CBC report the previous hon. member was referring to is full of erroneous information. The Canadian air transportation system is one of the safest in the world. Transport Canada inspectors do at least 10,000 inspections across the country every year to ensure that the airlines are complying with the regulations.

• (1455)

VETERANS

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister's political staff had access to a veteran's personal medical information. Ironically, the minister cannot discuss individual cases, precisely because of privacy protection concerns.

Can the minister explain why and under what circumstances political staff had access to the personal medical information of veterans?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. member that protecting the privacy of our veterans is a priority for our government. We have made significant progress in implementing the recommendations made by the Privacy Commissioner. That is why we have implemented a 10-point action plan, including privacy awareness and training for employees, enhanced monitoring of access, strict disciplinary measures, etc.

We are taking measures to ensure that information about our veterans is under the highest security.

[English]

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when a veteran makes a complaint, the response from the Conservatives is to check and access his personal medical information. It is an abuse of power whose clear goal is to threaten anyone who dares question or challenge them.

The minister suggested last week that he had taken steps to protect veterans' privacy. What are those steps and when will he table them?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wish the member would listen to the answer.

Any breach of privacy is totally unacceptable. We have put in place an action plan to deal with that issue. The Commissioner of Privacy is pleased with the action plan. It deals with employer awareness and training; access, controls and monitoring; and strict disciplinary measures.

We are supporting our veterans. The member and his party have left our veterans in a decade of darkness.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]*

● (1500)

FEDERAL JUDICIARY

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, only 8 of the 41 federal judges appointed by the Conservative government this year were women. In 2010, 13 out of 37 appointees were women. However, women have outnumbered men in law faculties for a number of years. In addition, the number of female lawyers in Canada has been rising continually. Canadians want the government and the Prime Minister to show leadership in the area of gender equality.

Why have this government and this Prime Minister given so little importance to equality? Will a benchmark be established for future appointments?

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no government has been more committed to the promotion of women than this government and I am very proud to be a part of this government.

Perhaps the hon. member has not heard but, when it comes to full-time judges, thanks to our government, women now represent approximately 40% of Canada's judiciary. I was just at the installation of a woman to the Supreme Court of Canada, which makes 5 out of the 11 judges at the federal Court of Appeals women, as are 8 of the 12 judges on the Alberta Court of Appeal and 12 out of the 14 on the B.C. Court of Appeal.

The NDP members should not make politics out of the judiciary. Supporting the judiciary is what they should be doing.

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what the government is not telling us is that those numbers are actually just getting worse and worse.

This year, under the Conservative government, less than 20% of judicial appointments are women. That is just not good enough. Talented female lawyers and all Canadian women deserve better.

Provinces and many other countries have moved to a transparent, arm's-length judicial appointment process. The government needs to improve appointment processes and set benchmarks for gender equity.

Why will the Conservative government not act now to ensure equity and equal opportunity for women?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud of this government's record. We continue to make appointments on the basis of merit and legal excellence. I would ask the hon. member to check her figures. The number of women has gone up under this administration at all different levels.

I would ask her to quit playing politics with the judiciary of this country. I say to opposition members to support the judiciary and the measures that have been undertaken by this government. It would be good for the NDP.

APEC SUMMIT

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government's top priority remains jobs and the economy. Canada's continuing strong performance in the face of ongoing challenges in the global economy is the envy of the world. With one of the fastest economic growth rates in the G7, low business costs and taxes, the world's soundest banking system and a job creating pro-trade plan, Canada offers many advantages.

Would the hard-working parliamentary secretary please update the House on the recent achievements at the APEC summit?

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we continue to strengthen our economic co-operation in the Asia-Pacific region. At the APEC summit, we signed a telecommunications agreement with Mexico and formally expressed our willingness to join the trans-Pacific partnership which represents a potential market of more than 775 million people.

At the same time, we will continue to defend and promote Canada's specific interests and every sector of our economy as part of our job creating pro-trade plan.

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CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, immigrants admitted through the government's live-in caregivers stream say that they have been duped by the immigration minister.

Prior to the May election, the minister touted the program's success and the government's supposed plans to help it grow but now he is clawing back their access to permanent residency and is making it ever harder for new live-in caregivers to come to Canada.

Will the minister stand up for these important immigrants or was his promise to support the live-in caregiver program just another pre-election ploy to grab votes?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wonder what Ruby Dhalla thinks about this issue.

This government has stood up for vulnerable caregivers in a way that the previous Liberal government was completely inactive. We have, for example, eliminated the requirement for a second medical examination so that when caregivers get sick during their temporary period in Canada they are not penalized. The Liberals never did that. We have moved the cost of recruitment fees, travel and health insurance from the caregivers to the employers. We have created a blacklist so we will deny work permits for caregivers to abusive employers. We have acted to protect vulnerable caregivers in a way the Liberals never did.

Routine Proceedings

MOTOR VEHICLE SAFETY

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, every year, Canadian cyclists and pedestrians die needlessly when they are sucked under the back wheels of large trucks. Twenty-five years ago in Europe, truck side guards were made mandatory. As a result, cyclists' deaths in Britain were cut by 61%. Having side guards may have saved the life of Jenna Morrison.

What will it take for the minister to act to protect Canadians and make truck side guards mandatory?

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, our thoughts and prayers go out to all those who have been involved in this type of tragic bicycle or pedestrian incidents. The case last week that the NDP member raised is very tragic. We take all these types of safety matters seriously. We are looking to research to see what can be done in this area.

Having said that, if the provinces feel that side guards are necessary, they are capable of mandating them themselves. I look forward to working with the member and any other member who has an interest in this topic.

TOURISM

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week, we received some great news. Canada's reputation among travellers was recognized as the best in the world by FutureBrand, an international design and branding firm.

Will the Minister of State for Small Business and Tourism please tell the House what this government is doing to help keep Canadian tourism at the top?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism), CPC): Mr. Speaker, because of guys like the member for Leeds—Grenville, we have a new national federal strategy for tourism and it is working. I am very proud of that and very proud of our work with the industry.

[*Translation*]

With the national tourism strategy, we have ensured that Canada's tourism businesses create jobs and that our country is positively recognized internationally. I am very proud of what we have accomplished and I wish to thank all members for their work in this area.

• (1505)

[*English*]

JUSTICE

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, within the last month, courts on Vancouver Island had to dismiss two serious drunk driving cases due to court delays. B.C. provincial jails, like Wilkinson Road Jail in my riding, are already at more than 200% over capacity, with the result being five riots in the system in the last two years. Now the government's ineffective, high-cost omnibus crime bill would put even more strain on our justice system.

Can the Minister of Justice explain to Canadians why the government is so determined to put corrections officers at even greater risk, and can he explain why he is pressing ahead with Bill C-10 when he should know it will put courts in the position of having to dismiss hundreds of serious criminal cases due to lack of resources?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the reason his Manitoba colleagues are supportive of what we are doing is that the particular bill targets those who molest children, the people involved with organized crime and drug traffickers. I suggest that the member go back, spend some time with his constituents and ask them how they feel about these important questions. I am sure that like all Canadians, they will be supportive of what we are doing in this area.

[*Translation*]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Prime Minister was quite happy to announce that Canada is now trying to officially join the Asia-Pacific free trade talks. What he did not say is that one of the conditions will be abandoning the Quebec agricultural model that has benefited thousands of farmers. Contrary to what the Minister of International Trade said on Saturday, the Prime Minister also stated that everything is negotiable.

My question is simple: what changed between Saturday night and Sunday? Why is the Prime Minister prepared to give up supply management to the detriment of our farmers?

[*English*]

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again I would ask the hon. member to go back and read the throne speech and take a look at our position and our stance since 2006, when we first formed government. Our protection and defence of supply management has not prevented us from entering into trade negotiations with partners around the world. The member may think it precludes it, but it actually does not, so we can defend our position on supply management in Canada and still have a pro-job, pro-trade plan for Canada.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

CANADA-BRAZIL AIR TRANSPORT AGREEMENT

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to section 32(2) of the Standing Orders, I have the pleasure to table, in both official languages, four treaties, the first of which is the agreement between the Government of Canada and the Government of the Federal Republic of Brazil on air transport, signed in Brazil on August 8, 2011.

CANADA-COSTA RICA AIR TRANSPORT AGREEMENT

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second treaty is the agreement of the Government of Canada and the Government of the Republic of Costa Rica on air transport, signed in San José on August 11, 2011.

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CANADA-KUWAIT FOREIGN INVESTMENT PROMOTION AND PROTECTION AGREEMENT

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the third treaty is the Canada-Kuwait Foreign Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement, signed in Ottawa on September 26, 2011.

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2010 PROTOCOL ON CARRIAGE OF HAZARDOUS AND NOXIOUS SUBSTANCES BY SEA

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fourth is the Protocol of 2010 to the International Convention on Liability and Compensation for Damage in Connection with the Carriage of Hazardous and Noxious Substances by Sea of 1996, signed in London on April 30, 2010.

An explanatory memorandum is included with each treaty.

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GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 20 petitions.

* * *

MOTOR VEHICLE SAFETY ACT

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-344, An Act to amend the Motor Vehicle Safety Act (side guards).

She said: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to move the cyclists-pedestrian protection act, which would help prevent senseless deaths caused by being pulled under the back wheels of large trucks. The bill calls for the mandatory installation of side guards on trucks. It is a safety measure used in many other nations.

The bill is too late for Jenna Morrison, a pregnant mom who was tragically killed while riding her bicycle in Toronto last week, but it is not too late for the ones she left behind. It is not too late for Lucas, her five-year-old son.

Other countries have acted. In Britain and Europe, these truck guards are mandatory, and lives have been saved. Cyclist deaths have been reduced. We have tried to pass this bill before in the House, but failed.

In Toronto tonight, the family and friends of Jenna Morrison will grieve for her in a memorial service. The bill would give them reason

to hope that this tragic loss would help to protect others. Let us proceed with this bill in Jenna Morrison's memory.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

* * *

● (1510)

CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND ETHICS COMMISSIONER REPORT

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP) moved:

That the report of the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner in relation to the former Member for Simcoe—Grey, presented by the Speaker on Monday, September 19, 2011, be referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs and that the Committee study the report with a view to further investigate the Commissioner's findings in order to resolve outstanding questions; and that the Committee report its findings to the House no later than six months after the adoption of this motion.

[Translation]

The Speaker: Before debate begins on the motion just moved, I would like to make a short statement.

As members well know, the Conflict of Interest Code for members of the House of Commons provides for certain procedures that the House must follow should the Ethics Commissioner conclude that a member has not complied with an obligation under the code. These procedures differ depending on the nature of the contravention and can lead to a debate and a vote on a motion to concur in the report.

[English]

In the case of the particular report that has given rise to the motion now before the House and without anticipating what decision the House may make, the chair believes that the House is now faced with a situation never envisaged when the code was first drafted. One basic principle entrenched in many of our rules allows for individuals who are the subject of such reports to be heard—that is, to participate in debate and present arguments. Indeed, section 28, paragraph 9 of the code assumes this in stating that:

Within 10 sitting days after the tabling of the report of the Commissioner in the House of Commons, the Member who is the subject of the report shall have a right to make a statement in the House immediately following Question Period, provided that he or she shall not speak for more than 20 minutes.

This opportunity is, of course, no longer afforded to the former member for Simcoe—Grey, who was not returned after the last election. It would seem to the chair that the House may wish to reflect on the circumstance, and accordingly I would invite the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to examine the code in light of this unforeseen situation and to make any recommendation it deems appropriate.

[Translation]

I thank honourable members for their attention.

[English]

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased that before we began this discussion today, you pointed out that the member who was the subject of this report is no longer in the House. If we are going to look at these issues as parliamentarians, we have to look at the larger implications rather than the individual behaviour of a member who, as you quite rightly pointed out, is no longer here to defend herself. That is something we should be reminded of.

All members of the House are very aware of the issues with the former member for Simcoe-Grey and her husband, Mr. Jaffer, in connection with the question of lobbying improprieties. That was ruled upon by the Ethics Commissioner. Once again, the Ethics Commissioner has given us an excellent report, and we greatly value the work of the Ethics Commissioner.

This matter should be moved to committee for study now because it is important to make sure that we learn the lessons from it, because as you will hear, Mr. Speaker, as I speak today, there are a number of questions about the inconsistencies, the gaps in testimony, the difficulty that the Ethics Commissioner stated she had in receiving evidence. This issue is larger than the behaviour of an individual member. If the Ethics Commissioner is charged to examine an issue, we have to ensure that he or she has the full resources and the ability to open the necessary doors. That is the reason we believe it should be moved on to committee to be examined.

A couple of key elements are germane to this discussion. One is that at the very beginning of her report, the Ethics Commissioner talks about how she was contacted by the Prime Minister's Office, which advised her to seek advice from a private investigator who would provide more information to the Ethics Commissioner on the allegations against Ms. Guergis and her husband. The Ethics Commissioner writes that she did contact the private investigator and was told that he had no allegations to present. At the time, this move by the Prime Minister attracted a great deal of media attention and perhaps may have prejudiced the case against Ms. Guergis somewhat. There is the question of why the Prime Minister intervened, sent the letter and told the Ethics Commissioner to speak with a private investigator, and then the private investigator clearly said that he had nothing to offer.

This is not the first time that the Ethics Commissioner has been led down the garden path by government members looking to deal perhaps more with partisan protection of their own party than with the larger issue at hand. We know that just a few weeks ago the Ethics Commissioner had to speak out on the role of the ethics committee and on the allegations made by the member for Peterborough against the New Democratic Party in a letter, thus creating a whole committee hearing based on allegations. The Ethics Commissioner had to come and say she was never presented with any evidence. She wanted to know how she could be expected to do her job if a member on the government side—the parliamentary secretary to the Prime Minister, in this case—made wild, unfounded accusations against an individual or against a political party and then refused to back them up. The impact in the media is that something terrible has occurred.

The Ethics Commissioner's job is to go through the evidence. She had obviously asked the member for Peterborough to present the

evidence to back up the allegations. He did not bother to do that. He actually took it to committee, where he made further, and in some cases, wild, hairy, outrageously bizarre accusations. However, not one of these accusations was backed up with any evidence. I think the Ethics Commissioner felt she was being used politically in a stunt, so the question of why the Prime Minister asked the Ethics Commissioner to speak with a private investigator who was not able to provide any evidence is certainly among the first questions that need to be asked.

As well, numerous inconsistencies and gaps in witness testimony were raised in the report. In particular, the Ethics Commissioner points out that Ms. Guergis and Mr. Jaffer, the husband and wife couple, both former members of Parliament, appeared to have difficulty remembering details around the events of August and September of 2009, including the letter that she wrote, the details surrounding that letter and the business dealings Mr. Jaffer had with the companies of Mr. Wright. She was unable to get a clear answer from them.

• (1515)

This is the central issue of the investigation. What was that business relationship? How did Mr. Jaffer play his role as an amateur lobbyist, while his wife was a cabinet minister? We should have been able to get clear answers, but none of those answers were given in a clear or straightforward manner. The Ethics Commissioner reported on this. Ms. Guergis and Mr. Jaffer are not here to explain their roles.

We need to look at this in terms of parliamentary procedure. We have to ensure that when the Ethics Commissioner is tasked with examining serious allegations of conflict of interest, that she is able to get the answers.

The other element that the commissioner raised in her report was the difficulty in obtaining documentary evidence. This again is key for us in order to ensure that the rules were followed.

I think members will agree with me that the case of Mr. Jaffer offering to help friends of his by opening doors to the Prime Minister's Office and the Conservative Party represents the new face of lobbying that we are seeing. Former members, former people with ties to the Conservative Party, are using their role to offer influence, but are not necessarily coming forward as lobbyists. They are flying under the radar.

There is a larger question of Mr. Jaffer and his role with Green Power Generation. Under the Lobbying Act, are we ensuring that the way this system is set up is actually working? We know the vast majority of the 5,000 or so lobbyists who troll various parts of the Hill at given times follow the rules. They write down with whom they meet. Some of them represent small volunteer organizations, while some represent very large powerful interests. The fact is free floaters like Mr. Jaffer come in and set up meetings. He was under the radar. This could have serious implications on the credibility of our system.

The difficulty faced by the Ethics Commissioner in getting documentary evidence on such a case needs to be examined.

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Jaffer told the Ethics Commissioner that he did not engage in work with Green Power Generation between his arrest on September 11, 2009, and mid to late October 2009, yet the Ethics Commissioner found that he was involved with Green Power Generation. He had discussions with Mr. Gillani's lawyer on September 16, 2009, about a contract. Emails were going back and forth. There were several discussions and at least one meeting with Mr. Wright in late September and ongoing 2009 about continuing work with them. Clearly the evidence that he gave contradicted the evidence the commissioner found.

What was used in their defence was the fact that they were not compensated. My friend from Winnipeg has often said, "Just because you're a bad lobbyist doesn't mean you are not a lobbyist. Just because you didn't end up making any money, doesn't mean you didn't contravene the act".

The fact that they did not end up making money out of this might be indicative of a couple of things. First, fortunately the light was shone on those corners fairly quickly and we saw them scurry off. Second, we understand that they were not doing this because it was seen as a benevolent society. There was clearly an understanding that if they were not compensated now, there would be compensation down the road. This is exactly the findings of the Ethics Commissioner. She states:

Even if Mr. Jaffer and Mr. Glémaud did not expect to be compensated specifically for their work...it would be reasonable to conclude that the prospect of a longer term relationship with International Strategic Investments or Wright Tech and Green Rite would depend on Green Power Generation's ability to add value to the business projects related to these companies...I therefore conclude that the work of Mr. Jaffer and Green Power Generation...was carried out with the expectation of future financial reward.

This is something that any average Canadian is going to understand. Obviously, if they were opening doors for a company to get contracts, they were doing it for the sense of financial benefit not just for the betterment of the human race. The fact that Mr. Jaffer was using his position as a former parliamentarian and as the husband of a key cabinet minister was obviously a question of conflict of interest.

This then relates to the other part of the marriage partnership. It was Ms. Guergis who said that she distanced herself and yet she wrote letters on behalf of interests. It was clearly found for the purposes of this inquiry that she had acted to further a private interest or had attempted to do so.

The findings of the Ethics Commissioner stand. They are not surprising to anyone who followed the case.

• (1520)

The issue is how often is this happening behind the scenes? How many other former parliamentarians are opening doors to friends? How many people are making financial arrangements based on the fact that it is who one knows in the PMO?

That is why the document does need to be examined. Even though it relates to an event that happened before the last election, the issues are still germane now.

I am more than willing to take any questions from my good friends and colleagues in the House.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saenich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am persuaded by the argument of the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay that these issues are not moot.

The former member for Simcoe—Grey was not re-elected. I think Helena Guergis' name was shabbily treated by people in her party in the way in which she was vilified and basically thrown to the RCMP for criminality when those charges were clearly false.

The reality is the conflict of interest and the use of the role of lobbyist by a former MP. There is a tremendous amount here that could use clarification for future guidance to clean up our roles and ensure the ethical behaviour of members of Parliament and former members of Parliament who continue to use the offices of their friends to advance business interests. The hon. member is quite right.

I ask for his view as to whether this issue could go forward even if the previous members are no longer in the House.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, we should have stated clearly at the beginning that everyone knows Ms. Guergis was made to be a political scapegoat for this party. The Ethics Commissioner pointed that out in the opening statement of her document where she talked about the Prime Minister contacting her about his allegations to the RCMP. We never even heard what those allegations were. There is an obvious sense that she was thrown under the bus.

However, out of this study there are clear questions about whether people are able to fly under the radar of the Lobbying Act and open doors for their friends. There is certainly a sense in Ottawa right now that the Conservatives are open for business with their buddies and that is done in the backrooms.

This report came out. We were dealing with this issue just before the last election, but these issues have not been solved. We need to take this to committee. We need to look at the role of the Lobbying Act. We need to look at whether the Ethics Commissioner has the ability to ensure that the light is shone in the dark recesses of that Conservative gang over there.

• (1525)

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, ironically when I read what is called the Guergis report, there is another name I could put, that being the President of the Treasury Board report. The recent \$50 million boondoggle event which occurred in his riding is eerily similar to what is happening here. The member is right. It is not what one knows; it is who one knows. Obviously some people knew who he was because he was able to divert \$50 million from border security into everything else in his riding.

The Conservatives have not learned anything from the Guergis report or from what happened to Helena Guergis. Therefore, could my colleague elaborate on whether he sees a trend within the cabinet of the Conservative Party?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, certainly we have a minister who had his hands on \$50 million he never should have had his hands on in the first place, blew it and then claimed he did not have a paper trail.

Routine Proceedings

If the Canada Revenue Agency phoned folks back home, said that it heard they got their hands on a couple of million dollars, blew it and asked what they spent it on and if they said that they did not have a paper trail, do people think the agency would say that it was okay, that the next time it would do things differently?

We see a breach to the sense of obligation that parliamentarians are meant to be held to a code. I think the Conservatives believe they are above that code. I cannot think of a precedence other than perhaps Huey Long, the long-standing governor in Louisiana who used to give out pork off the back of a truck, or Maurice Duplessis in Quebec. However, there is a sense now that the way they do business is out of the back of their vans driving up the country roads of Muskoka. Apparently, they are giving out so much pork in Muskoka now that some members seem to have little curly tails behind them.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, could the member for Timmins—James Bay elaborate on what he hopes would come out of the procedure and House affairs committee if the matter were referred there?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, we need to find out what the obstructions were in terms of getting the documents, what the problem was with getting clear witness testimony that was verifiable and what the role of the Prime Minister was in sending a letter, talking about RCMP allegations that were never brought to light.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, sadly, we see that the member for Timmins—James Bay is continuing with the NDP pattern of delay and obfuscation when it comes to debating government legislation. We have government legislation that we consider to be of importance to all Canadians, yet the NDP sees fit on almost a daily basis to try to delay and sidetrack important debate from occurring in this place.

Therefore, I have no alternative but to, regretfully, move the following motion. I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

The Speaker: The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Speaker: Call in the members.

• (1605)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 54)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Aglukkaq
Albas	Albrecht
Alexander	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Allison	Ambler
Anders	Anderson
Armstrong	Ashfield
Aspin	Bateman
Benoit	Bernier
Bezan	Blaney
Block	Bouphen
Braid	Broitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Brunoogoe	Butt
Calandra	Calkins
Cannan	Carmichael
Carrie	Chisu
Chong	Clarke
Clement	Daniel
Davidson	Dechert
Del Mastro	Dreoshen
Dykstra	Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Fletcher
Galipeau	Gallant
Gill	Glover
Goguen	Goldring
Goodyear	Gossal
Gourde	Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hayes	Hiebert
Hillier	Hogback
Hoeppner	Holder
James	Jean
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kennedy (Calgary Southeast)
Kent	Kerr
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lake	Lauzon
Leaf	Leitch
Lemieux	Leung
Lizon	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Mayes	McColeman
McLeod	Menegakis
Menzies	Merrifield
Miller	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
O'Neill Gordon	Oda
Oliver	Opitz
Paradis	Payne
Penashue	Poitelvie
Preston	Raitt
Rajotte	Rathgeber
Reid	Rempel
Richards	Richardson
Rickford	Ritz
Schellenberger	Sceback
Shea	Shipley
Shory	Smith
Sopuck	Storenson
Stanton	Storseth
Strahl	Sweet
Tilson	Toet
Toews	Trost
Trotter	Truppe
Twedd	Uppal
Valcourt	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	Wilks
Williamson	Wong
Woodworth	Young (Oakville)
Young (Vancouver South)	Zimmer— 150

Routine Proceedings

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Angus
Aubin	Bélanger
Bennett	Benskin
Bevington	Blanchette
Blanchette-Lamothe	Boivin
Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet
Brahmi	Brisson
Brosseau	Byrne
Caron	Casey
Cash	Charlton
Chicoine	Choquette
Chow	Christopherson
Cleary	Coderre
Comartin	Côté
Cotler	Crowder
Cuzner	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Day	Dion
Dionne Labelle	Doré Lefebvre
Dubé	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duscault	Easter
Eyking	Fortin
Freeman	Garncau
Garrison	Genest-Jourdain
Giguère	Godin
Goodale	Gravelle
Grogg	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Harris (St. John's East)	Hughes
Jacob	Julian
Kellway	Lamoureaux
Lapointe	Larose
Latendresse	Laverdière
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Leslie	Liu
Mai	Marston
Masse	Mathysen
May	McGuinity
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	Michaud
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Murray	Nantel
Nash	Nicholls
Nunez-Melo	Pacetti
Papillon	Péclét
Perrault	Pilon
Quach	Rafferty
Ravignat	Raynault
Regan	Rousseau
Sandhu	Scarpaleggia
Sellah	Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind- sor)
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	St-Denis
Stewart	Stoffer
Thibault	Toone
Tremblay	Trudeau
Turnell	Valeriote — 108

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I refer to what has just taken place. I look at the order paper where it says that debate is limited to two hours, pursuant to section 28(11) of the Conflict of Interest Code for Members of the House of Commons. That is reflecting the amount of debate that should have been allowed on this particular issue.

That is the reason I stand on a point of order. It is important to note that the NDP had moved a motion that was supposed to be entitled to two hours of debate and before any other member was even afforded the opportunity to speak to the motion, the government, using its majority, made the—

• (1610)

The Speaker: Order, please. I have to stop the member there.

The motion to adjourn a debate is not debatable. It is votable and members have all had the opportunity to express their view on the motion, and the House has just taken a decision on it.

[Translation]

Given the results of the previous vote, the Chair would like to remind the House of the provisions of subsection 28(12) of the Conflict of Interest Code for Members of the House of Commons, which reads:

[English]

If no motion pursuant to subsection (11) has been previously moved and disposed of, a motion to concur in the report shall be deemed to have been moved on the 30th sitting day after the day on which the report was tabled, and the Speaker shall immediately put every question necessary to dispose of the motion.

Given that the motion of the member for Timmins—James Bay has not been disposed of and given that today is the 30th sitting day after the day on which the report was tabled, the Chair is obliged to proceed.

[Translation]

In accordance with subsection 28(12) of the Conflict of Interest Code for Members of the House of Commons, a motion to concur in the report of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, entitled *The Guergis Report*, is deemed to have been moved.

[English]

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Speaker: The chief government whip has just advised me that if I were to seek it, I might find consent to proceed with the vote immediately.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: There is no consent.

Call in the members.

• (1650)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

Routine Proceedings

(Division No. 55)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy
 Adler
 Albas
 Alexander
 Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
 Ambler
 Anderson
 Armstrong
 Aspin
 Bateman
 Bennett
 Benskin
 Bevington
 Blanchette
 Blaney
 Boivin
 Boulterice
 Brahmj
 Brethkreuz
 Brusseau
 Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
 Butt
 Calandra
 Cannan
 Caron
 Casey
 Charlton
 Chisu
 Choquette
 Christopherson
 Cleary
 Coderre
 Côté
 Crowder
 Daniel
 Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
 Dechert
 Dion
 Doré Lefebvre
 Dubé
 Dusseault
 Easter
 Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
 Fletcher
 Freeman
 Gallant
 Garrison
 Giguère
 Glover
 Goguen
 Goodale
 Gossal
 Gravelle
 Grogghe
 Harris (St. John's East)
 Hawin
 Hebert
 Hieback
 Holder
 Jacob
 Jean
 Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
 Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
 Kerr
 Krump (Prince Edward—Hastings)
 Lamoureux
 Larose
 Lauzon
 LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
 Leef
 Lemieux
 Leung
 Lizon
 Lukiwski
 MacKay (Central Nova)
 Mai
 Masse
 May

Adams
 Aglukkaq
 Albrecht
 Allen (Welland)
 Allison
 Anders
 Angus
 Ashfield
 Aubin
 Bélanger
 Benoit
 Bernier
 Bezan
 Blanchette-Lamothe
 Block
 Boughen
 Boutin-Sweet
 Braid
 Brison
 Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
 Bruinoooge
 Byrne
 Calkins
 Carmichael
 Carrie
 Cash
 Chicoine
 Chong
 Chow
 Clarke
 Clement
 Comartin
 Cotler
 Cuzner
 Davidson
 Day
 Del Mastro
 Dionne Labelle
 Dreschen
 Duncan (Etobicoke North)
 Dykstra
 Eyking
 Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
 Fortin
 Galipeau
 Garneau
 Genest-Jourdain
 Gill
 Godin
 Goldring
 Goodyear
 Gourde
 Grewal
 Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
 Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
 Ilayes
 Hillyer
 Hoepfner
 Hughes
 James
 Julian
 Kellway
 Kent
 Komarnicki
 Lake
 Lapointe
 Latendresse
 Laverdière
 LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
 Leitch
 Leslie
 Liu
 Lobb
 Lunney
 MacKenzie
 Marston
 Mathysen
 Mayes

McColeman
 McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
 Menegakis
 Merrifield
 Miller
 Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
 Moore (Fundy Royal)
 Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
 Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
 Nantel
 Nicholls
 Norlock
 O'Connor
 Oda
 Opitz
 Papillon
 Patry
 Péclet
 Perreault
 Poilievre
 Quach
 Raitt
 Rathgeber
 Raynault
 Reid
 Richards
 Rickford
 Roussau
 Scarpaleggia
 Seebach
 Shea
 Shory
 Sims (Newton—North Delta)
 Sopuck
 St-Denis
 Stewart
 Storseth
 Sweet
 Tilson
 Tocews
 Tremblay
 Trottiar
 Truppe
 Tweed
 Valcourt
 Van Kesteren
 Wallace
 Warkentin
 Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)
 Weston (Saint John)
 Wilks
 Wong
 Young (Oakville)
 Zimmer—259

McGuity
 McLeod
 Menzies
 Michaud
 Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
 Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
 Murray
 Nash
 Nicholson
 Nunce-Melo
 O'Neill Gordon
 Oliver
 Pacetti
 Paradis
 Payne
 Penashuc
 Pilon
 Preston
 Rafferty
 Rajotte
 Ravignat
 Regan
 Rempel
 Richardson
 Ritz
 Sandhu
 Schellenberger
 Sellah
 Shipley
 Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
 Smith
 Sorenson
 Stanton
 Stoffer
 Strahl
 Thibault
 Toet
 Toone
 Trost
 Trudeau
 Turmel
 Uppal
 Valeriot
 Van Loan
 Warawa
 Watson
 Williamson
 Woodworth
 Young (Vancouver South)

NAYS

PAIRED

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the question to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment is as follows: the hon. member for Vaudreuil-Soulanges, Infrastructure.

PETITIONS

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition signed by a number of people across western Canada, particularly in Saskatchewan and Alberta, expressing their concern about Canadians who are suffering from the combination of multiple sclerosis and chronic cerebrospinal venous insufficiency, otherwise known as CCSVI. They point out that when the two diseases appear to occur together simultaneously, often our medical system declines to treat the multiple sclerosis or the CCSVI with the new angioplasty type of treatment.

The petitioners are calling upon the Minister of Health to consult more broadly with experts, particularly those who have experience with the new technology and treatments. They urge the Minister of Health to proceed with phase III clinical trials on an urgent basis with respect to this new treatment and to develop a follow-up system so the consequences of the treatment can be accurately tracked.

• (1655)

[Translation]

WAPIKONI MOBILE

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today, I am very pleased to present a petition signed by nearly 2,000 people—it is too heavy for me to lift—including a number of residents of a first nation village, people from various cities and elected officials.

As you can see, these people come from a variety of backgrounds but they all firmly believe in a very important project: Wapikoni Mobile. This program, which produces movies and music, gives hope to aboriginal youth and sometimes literally saves their lives, is itself in danger.

The program's main source of funding—the \$490,000 that it receives from the federal government and that ensures the survival of the mobile studio—was eliminated without warning.

Yet, in the seven years that the program has been in place, Wapikoni Mobile has proven its worth. Young participants have won 49 national and international awards, which is an average of seven awards per year.

How many projects can boast such an accomplishment?

Wapikoni Mobile must survive. That is what the nearly 2,000 people who signed this petition are asking the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development.

[English]

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition regarding chronic cerebrospinal venous insufficiency, or CCSVI. Canada has one of the highest rates of devastating multiple sclerosis in the world with 55,000 to 75,000 Canadians suffering. Four hundred people die of MS each year and the suicide rate among MS patients is many times that of the national population.

Routine Proceedings

While the government has announced clinical trials for CCSVI, all we have right now is announcements. What we need is action. Canadians with MS cannot afford to wait as any delay possibly means more damage. Therefore the petitioners call on the Minister of Health to consult experts actively engaged in diagnosis and treatment of CCSVI, to undertake phase III clinical trials on an urgent basis with a large patient participation in multiple centres across Canada and to require follow-up care.

HEALTH

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to proudly place this petition in the House for consideration by the government regarding a fundamental right for individuals to be able to choose to prevent illness. Freedom of choice in health care is becoming increasingly curtailed and further threatened by legislation and statutory regulations. The petitioners call on Parliament to guarantee the right of every Canadian to health freedom by enacting the charter of health freedom, drafted for the Natural Health Products Protection Association on September 4, 2008. The petitioners are primarily from central Newfoundland including Grand Falls, Windsor, Bishop's Falls and also Buchans.

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Questions Nos. 148 and 157 will be answered today.

[Text]

Question No. 148—**Ms. Elizabeth May:**

With regard to the Afghan detainee documents, excluding all matters which are in their nature secret, for each document: (a) what are its contents; (b) what are the names of the (i) sender, (ii) recipients; and (c) on what date was it sent?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on March 25, 2010, and on April 1, 2011, two sets of documents pertaining to Afghan detainees were tabled in the House of Commons. These documents can be accessed through the House of Commons Journals, sessional paper numbers 8530-403-3 and 8530-403-4.

On June 22, 2011, as agreed to by unanimous consent, the Minister of Foreign Affairs tabled an additional 362 documents.

The 362 documents tabled in the House of Commons on June 22, 2011 can be accessed through the Government of Canada's website on Afghanistan at the following address: <http://www.afghanistan.gc.ca/canada-afghanistan/documents/362.aspx?lang=eng>.

Parliamentarians also have direct access to the June 22, 2011, documents through the Journals in the House of Commons, which can be referenced through sessional paper number 8530-411-3.

The tabling brought to a close a \$12 million, 12-month process that reinforced what the government has said all along.

Question No. 157—**Mr. Claude Patry:**

With respect to the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) program of the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development: (a) how many GIS recipients were there in 2010 and 2011, by municipality, (i) in the riding of Jonquière—Alma, (ii) in the riding of Chicoutimi—Le Fjord?

Routine Proceedings

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there were approximately 6,700 guaranteed income supplement, GIS, recipients in 2010, and 6,800 in 2011, in the riding of Jonquière-Alma.

There were approximately 7,000 GIS recipients in 2010 and 7,200 GIS recipients in 2011 in the riding of Chicoutimi-Le Fjord.

GIS recipients are not available by municipality .

* * *

[English]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if Questions Nos. 145, 146, 147, 149, 150, 152, 153, 154, 155, 156, 158, 159 and 160 could be made orders for returns, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 145—Hon. Ralph Goodale:

Have any studies of any kind whatsoever been undertaken by any Minister or any department or agency, or any non-governmental individual or entity at the request of any Minister or government department or agency, pertaining to the impacts, consequences, costs or benefits of eliminating the single-desk marketing system of the Canadian Wheat Board: (a) what were the terms of reference of any such studies; (b) who specifically worked on those studies and what were their professional qualifications; (c) when were any such studies begun; (d) when were they completed; (e) what were their principal findings; and (f) when will they be made public?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 146—Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims:

With respect to the Economic Action Plan: (a) under the Infrastructure Stimulus Fund, in the riding of Newton—North Delta, (i) to date, what is the name and nature of each approved project, (ii) for each project, who are the partners involved and what is each partner's contribution, including the government's contribution, (iii) for each project, how much of the funding has flowed and to whom, (iv) what criteria were used to determine which projects were approved; (b) under the Building Canada Fund—Communities Component, in the riding of Newton—North Delta, (i) to date, what is the name and nature of each approved project, (ii) for each project, who are the partners involved and what is each partner's contribution, including the government's contribution, (iii) for each project, how much of the funding has flowed and to whom, (iv) what criteria were used to determine which projects were approved; (c) under the Building Canada Fund—Communities Component top-up, in the riding Newton—North Delta, (i) to date, what is the name and nature of each approved project, (ii) for each project, who are the partners involved and what is each partner's contribution, including the government's contribution, (iii) for each project, how much of the funding has flowed and to whom, (iv) what criteria were used to determine which projects were approved; (d) under the Building Canada Fund Major Infrastructure Component, in the riding of Newton—North Delta, (i) to date, what is the name and nature of each approved project, (ii) for each project, who are the partners involved and what is each partner's contribution, including the government's contribution, (iii) for each project, how much of the funding has flowed and to whom, (iv) what criteria were used to determine which projects were approved; (e) under the Recreational Infrastructure program in the riding of Newton—North Delta, (i) to date, what is the name and nature of each approved project, (ii) for each project, who are the partners involved and what is each partner's contribution, including the government's contribution, (iii) for each project, how much of the funding has flowed and to whom, (iv) what criteria were used to determine which projects were approved; and (f) under the Green Infrastructure Fund in the riding of Newton—North Delta, (i) to date, what is the name and nature of each approved project, (ii) for each project, who are the partners involved and what is each partner's contribution, including the government's contribution, (iii) for each project,

how much of the funding has flowed and to whom, (iv) what criteria were used to determine which projects were approved?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 147—Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims:

What is the total amount of government funding since fiscal year 2009-2010, up to and including the current fiscal year, allocated within the constituency of Newton—North Delta, identifying each department or agency, initiative and amount?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 149—Hon. John McCallum:

With regard to each department and agency and for each fiscal year from 2006-2007 to 2010-2011: (a) what is the number of Advanced Contract Award Notifications (ACAN) issued; and (b) for each ACAN issued by the department, (i) what is the date the ACAN was issued, (ii) who is the supplier identified in the ACAN, (iii) what is the number of other suppliers which provided a statement of capabilities for the ACAN, (iv) was the ACAN converted to a full tender, (v) was the contract awarded to the original supplier identified in the ACAN, (vi) what was the value of the contract at the time of its awarding, (vii) what was the total value paid for the contract once the work was complete?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 150—Hon. John McCallum:

With regard to the government-owned aircraft, since April 1, 2006, to present: (a) by fiscal quarter, what is the number of times government aircraft have been used by a minister, including the Prime Minister, or a minister's, including the Prime Minister's, exempt staff; and (b) what is every aircraft on which a minister, the Prime Minister, or a minister's or the Prime Minister's exempt staff have flown and, for each aircraft, what is (i) the tail number, make and model of the aircraft, (ii) the average hourly cost to operate the aircraft, (iii) the average hourly cost for food and beverages while the aircraft is in use, (iv) the department with tasking authority for the aircraft, (v) the title of the person with tasking authority for the aircraft, (vi) the number of times the aircraft has been used by a minister or the Prime Minister, (vii) the number of times the aircraft has been used by a member of a minister's or the Prime Minister's staff without the minister or the Prime Minister being on board the aircraft?

(Return tabled)

Routine Proceedings

Question No. 152—Ms. Kirsty Duncan:

With respect to the development of unconventional gas resources, including shale, tight and coal bed methane, and its possible impacts on the environment: (a) what, if any, research has the government undertaken regarding the development of unconventional gas resources, (i) what was the scope of this research in the areas of, but not limited to, air quality, aquatic and terrestrial ecosystem impacts, economic impacts, occupational risks, public safety concerns, and seismic risks, (ii) what, if any, resources did the government provide for this research, (iii) what, if any, process was established to ensure the independence of the researchers, their research, and their findings, (iv) what, if any, case studies were considered as a part of this research, (v) what, if any, scenarios regarding the development of unconventional gas resources were developed as frameworks for the research, (vi) what economic, environmental and social impacts were identified by this research, (vii) what, if any, priority research areas were identified for further study as a result of this research, (viii) what, if any, departments were involved in this research, (ix) what, if any, action was undertaken to ensure inter-departmental cooperation throughout the research process, (x) what, if any, gaps or weaknesses in the regulatory framework did the research identify, (b) what, if any, research has the government undertaken regarding balancing shale gas' potential contribution to energy security with environmental risks; (c) what are the sources of greenhouse gas emissions associated with unconventional gas; (d) has the government developed a process to determine the overall carbon footprint of shale gas throughout the life cycle of natural gas use, if not, why not, and, if so, (i) what federal departments are involved in this process, (ii) how does the government ensure inter-departmental collaboration on this process, (iii) what is the process, (iv) what, if any, data has been acquired and analysed through this process, (v) what is the government's estimate of shale gas' potential footprint in Canada; (e) what are the government's calculations concerning how the overall carbon footprint of shale gas compares with conventional oil and gas for various end-uses; (f) what, if any, analysis has the government conducted concerning carbon capture and storage opportunities in the development of unconventional gas resources, namely analysis of (i) its feasibility, (ii) its cost-effectiveness, (iii) its reliability, (iv) liabilities that might arise from such strategies; (g) what, if any, research has the government undertaken regarding how effective well construction practices are at containing fluids and gases before, during, and after hydraulic fracturing, what are the dates of any such studies, and what were the results of this research; (h) what, if any, research has the government undertaken regarding well-bore drilling and sealing techniques and their reliability in containing hydraulic fracturing fluids and produced water from shale gas extraction, what are the dates of any such studies, and what were the results of this research; (i) what, if any, cases of gas bubbling (i.e. methane contaminating surface water) related to hydraulic fracturing have been reported, and what, if any, process is in place to ensure reporting; (j) what, if any, cases of drinking water contamination related to shale gas activity have been reported, and what, if any, process is in place to ensure reporting; (k) what are the potential impacts of the injection and fracturing process on (i) water availability, (ii) water quality, (iii) water quantity; (l) what, if any, studies has the government undertaken, for each of the issues listed in (k); (m) what are the potential impacts of pre-existing human-made or natural pathways and features on contaminant transport, (i) how is the concept of "acceptable risk" defined and determined, (ii) which wells, if any, have undergone a risk analysis, (iii) which wells, if any, have been found to exceed "acceptable risk", (iv) what are the potential impacts on drinking water, (v) what factors may affect the likelihood of contamination of drinking water resources, (vi) what are the possible human health impacts of possible drinking water contamination, (vii) how effective are mitigation approaches in reducing impacts to drinking water resources; (n) what is the specific composition of hydraulic fracturing fluids, (i) what chemicals are non-biodegradable, (ii) how long does each persist in the ground, (iii) how are non-biodegradable chemicals tracked in groundwater, (iv) does the government currently undertake any such tracking, (v) what, if any, results are available concerning this tracking; (o) what steps is the government taking to ensure that the volume of water required for shale gas fracturing does not challenge resources in regions already experiencing water stress; (p) what is the composition and variability of flowback and produced water, and what does the government project will be the possible impacts of releases of flowback and produced water on drinking water resources; (q) what steps, if any, is the government taking to ensure that best practices are adopted by industry in areas including, but not limited to, well development and construction, especially casing, cementing, and pressure management; (r) have micro-seismic surveys been conducted to assure that hydraulic fracturing is limited to gas-producing formations; (s) what steps, if any, is the government taking to ensure (i) inspections at safety-critical stages of well construction and hydraulic fracturing, (ii) that operators take prompt action to repair defective cementing jobs; (t) what analysis, if any, has the government conducted concerning whether it should require that baseline water quality and quantity monitoring occur prior to the hydraulic fracturing process; (u) what analysis, if any, has the government conducted concerning encouraging or

requiring producers of unconventional gas to use non-toxic drilling fluids; (v) what analysis, if any, has the government conducted concerning the implementation of proximal restrictions for both horizontal and vertical drilling with the aim of avoiding the potential for contamination of valuable water sources; (w) what analysis, if any, has the government conducted concerning strategies that would ensure that companies declare the type, concentration, and volume of all chemicals added to the hydraulic fracturing fluid; (x) what is the government's assessment regarding whether the necessary resources exist to detect identified chemicals in water supplies should an incident lead to potential contamination of water resources; (y) what analysis, if any, has the government conducted concerning important landscapes, habitats, and migration corridors to inform planning, prevention, mitigation and reclamation of surface impacts; (z) what analysis, if any, has the government conducted concerning the need to limit drilling and support infrastructure in unique or sensitive areas; and (aa) what, if any, studies has the government undertaken regarding (i) the prospects for shale gas in Canada, (ii) Canadian shale gas estimates, (iii) Canadian exploration and production of shale gas, (iv) shale gas markets and prices, (v) the security of the supply of shale gas, (vi) government support for shale gas production, (vii) renewable energy sources in comparison with shale gas, (viii) the risks of rapid depletion of shale gas, (ix) regulatory challenges surrounding shale gas?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 153—Mr. Claude Patry:

With respect to budget cuts at the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development, including the computerization of Employment Insurance claims: (a) how many jobs will be cut across Canada over the next three years, (i) by region, (ii) by province; (b) when will these cuts take place and what Employment Insurance claims processing centres will be affected; (c) how many jobs will be transferred; (d) how many jobs will be eliminated through attrition; (e) how many public liaison officer positions will be eliminated; (f) how will the computerization of claims processing affect service to citizens in impacted areas; (g) exactly how much money will the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development save through these job cuts; (h) how will the computerization of claims processing help reduce wait times; (i) what is the department's strategy to ensure that the transition to computerized claims processing does not increase wait times; (j) how long will it take, on average, to process a claim once the system is computerized; (k) how can a person without access to the Internet or basic computer skills file an Employment Insurance claim online; (l) what are the reasons for choosing to centralize claims processing in one centre over another, (i) was the unemployment rate one of the selection criteria; and (i) why are services being centralized in Thetford Mines, in the riding of Mégantic—L'Érable, not in New Richmond?

(Return tabled)

*Routine Proceedings***Question No. 154—Mrs. Carol Hughes:**

With regard to surplus lighthouses being made available under the Heritage Lighthouse Protection Act: (a) concerning the land surrounding the light stations, (i) will the Treasury Board Decision #828161 allow “sponsors” to proceed with plans to use the land to make the sites economically self-supporting, (ii) will up-to-date surveys be conducted of all properties prior to transfer; (b) concerning the contaminated or toxic sites that are reported to be present on all light stations, (i) will “sponsors” be shown where they are, told what they are composed of, and given written assurance by the Ministry of the Environment that all dangerous materials have been removed; and (c) concerning the cost of bringing the buildings “up to standard” as outlined by building inspectors (Maintenance Cost Studies), (i) will monies be made available to cover this cost, (ii) what kind of financial and advisory support will be provided to assist the “sponsors” in employing the approved methods of care and development of the sites to meet heritage specifications, (iii) will the government be establishing a fund under the auspices of Heritage Canada, whereby “sponsors” of lighthouses can apply for “renovation funds” if local fund-raising efforts need topping up?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 155—Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach:

With regard to the Lac Saint-François, Cap Tourmente, Baie de l'Île-Verte and Pointe-de-l'Est national wildlife areas: (a) did the fixed or firm prices of the service contracts between the non-governmental agencies of these areas and Environment Canada decrease between May 2010 and September 1, 2011; (b) what are the reasons for the reduced fixed prices for these areas; (c) are the general conditions of the service contracts for these areas different from those of previous years; (d) are the service contract statements of work for these areas different from those of previous years; (e) what is the financial allocation plan for these areas; (f) did Environment Canada hold consultations on the fixed prices or budgets of these areas; (g) who were the individuals consulted; (h) who made the decisions regarding the fixed prices for these areas; (i) was a value-for-money assessment conducted on Canada's wildlife areas; and (j) are changes to the fixed or firm prices of other areas across the country being considered?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 156—Ms. Irene Mathysen:

With regard to Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) funding in the riding of London-Fanshawe for the last five fiscal years: (a) what is the total amount of spending by (i) year, (ii) program; and (b) what is the amount of each spending item by (i) Aboriginal Skills and Employment Partnership (ASEP), (ii) Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy, (iii) Aboriginal Skills and Training Strategic Investment Fund, (iv) Adult Learning Literacy and Essential Skills Program, (v) Apprenticeship Completion Grant, (vi) Apprenticeship Incentive Grant, (vii) Career Development Services Research (Employment Programs), (viii) Canada—European Union Program for Cooperation in Higher Education, Training and Youth (International Academic Mobility Program), (ix) Canada Summer Jobs (Youth Employment Strategy Program), (x) Career Focus (Youth Employment Strategy Program), (xi) Children and Families (Social Development Partnerships Program), (xii) Contributions for Consultation and Partnership-Building and Canadian-Based Cooperative Activities (International Trade and Labour Program), (xiii) Disability Component (Social Development Partnerships Program), (xiv) Employment Programs—Career Development Services Research, (xv) Enabling Accessibility Fund, (xvi) Enabling Fund for Official Language Minority Communities, (xvii) Federal Public Service Youth Internship Program (Youth Employment Strategy Program), (xviii) Fire Prevention Grants, (xix) Fire Safety Organizations, (xx) Foreign Credential Recognition Program, (xxi) Homelessness Partnering Strategy, (xxii) International Academic Mobility—Canada—European Union Program for Cooperation in Higher Education, Training and Youth, (xxiii) International Academic Mobility—North American Mobility in Higher Education, (xxiv) International Labour Institutions in which Canada Participates Grants (International Trade and Labour Program), (xxv) International Trade and Labour Program (ITLP) Contributions for Consultation and Partnership-Building and Canadian-Based Cooperative Activities, (xxvi) International Trade and Labour Program (ITLP) Grants for Technical Assistance and Foreign-Based Cooperative Activities, (xxvii) International Trade and Labour Program (ITLP) International Labour Institutions in which Canada Participates Grants, (xxviii) Labour-Management Partnership Program, (xxix) Labour Market Agreements, (xxx) Labour Market Agreements for Persons with Disabilities, (xxxi) Labour Market Development Agreements, (xxxii) Labour Mobility, (xxxiii) New Horizons for Seniors Program, (xxxiv) Occupational Health and Safety, (xxxv) Opportunities Fund for Persons with

Disabilities, (xxxvi) Organizations that Write Occupational Health and Safety Standards, (xxxvii) Sector Council Program, (xxxviii) Skills and Partnership Fund—Aboriginal, (xxxix) Skills Link (Youth Employment Strategy Program), (xl) Small Project Component (Enabling Accessibility Fund), (xli) Social Development Partnerships Program—Children and Families, (xlii) Social Development Partnerships Program—Disability Component, (xliii) Surplus Federal Real Property for Homelessness Initiative, (xliv) Targeted Initiative for Older Workers, (xv) Technical Assistance and Foreign-Based Cooperative Activities Grants (International Trade and Labour Program), (xvi) Work-Sharing, (xlvii) Youth Awareness, (xlviii) Youth Employment Strategy—Canada Summer Jobs, (xlix) Youth Employment Strategy—Career Focus, (l) Youth Employment Strategy—Federal Public Service Youth Internship Program, (li) Youth Employment Strategy—Skills Link?

(Return tabled)

*Routine Proceedings***Question No. 158—Mr. Claude Patry:**

With regard to Human Resources and Skills Development Canada funding in the riding of Jonquière—Alma for the last five fiscal years: (a) what is the total amount of spending by (i) year, (ii) program; and (b) what is the amount of each spending item by (i) Technical Assistance and Foreign-Based Cooperative Activities (International Trade and Labour Program), (ii) Skills Link (Youth Employment Strategy), (iii) Consultation and Partnership-Building and Canadian-Based Cooperative Activities (International Trade and Labour Program), (iv) Canada Summer Jobs (Youth Employment Strategy), (v) Children and Families (Social Development Partnerships Program), (vi) Labour Market Development Agreements, (vii) Labour Market Agreements, (viii) Labour Market Agreements for Persons with Disabilities, (ix) Enabling Fund for Official Language Minority Communities, (x) Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities, (xi) Aboriginal Skills and Training Strategic Investment, (xii) Enabling Accessibility Fund, (xiii) Skills and Partnership Fund—Aboriginal, (xiv) Targeted Initiative for Older Workers, (xv) International Academic Mobility Initiative—Canada-European Union Program for Co-operation in Higher Education, Training and Youth, (xvi) International Academic Mobility Initiative—Program for North American Mobility in Higher Education, (xvii) Surplus Federal Real Property for Homelessness Initiative, (xviii) International Labour Institutions in which Canada Participates (International Trade and Labour Program), (xix) Labour Mobility, (xx) New Horizons for Seniors, (xxi) Career Focus (Youth Employment Strategy), (xxii) Fire Safety Organizations, (xxiii) Organizations that Write Occupational Health and Safety Standards, (xxiv) Social Development Partnerships Program—Disability, (xxv) Foreign Credential Recognition Program Loans (pilot project), (xxvi) Fire Prevention Canada, (xxvii) Adult Learning, Literacy and Essential Skills Program, (xxviii) Canada-European Union Program for Co-operation in Higher Education, Training and Youth (International Academic Mobility Initiative), (xxix) Labour-Management Partnerships Program, (xxx) Social Development Partnerships Program—Disability, (xxxi) Foreign Credential Recognition Program, (xxxii) International Trade and Labour Program—Technical Assistance and Foreign-Based Cooperative Activities, (xxxiii) International Trade and Labour Program—Consultation and Partnership-Building and Canadian-Based Cooperative Activities, (xxxiv) International Trade and Labour Program—International Labour Institutions in which Canada Participates, (xxxv) Sector Council Program, (xxxvi) Federal Public Sector Youth Internship Program (Youth Employment Strategy), (xxxvii) Aboriginal Skills and Employment Partnership Program, (xxxix) Employment Programs—Career Development Services Research, (xli) Career Development Services Research (Employment Programs), (xlii) Occupational Health and Safety, (xliii) Youth Awareness, (xliv) Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy, (xlv) Homelessness Partnering Strategy, (xlvi) Youth Employment Strategy—Skills Link, (xlvii) Youth Employment Strategy—Canada Summer Jobs, (xlviii) Youth Employment Strategy—Career Focus, (xlviii) Youth Employment Strategy—Federal Public Sector Youth Internship Program, (xlix) Apprenticeship Completion Grant, (li) Apprenticeship Incentive Grant, (lii) Work-Sharing, (lii) Small Project Component (Enabling Accessibility Fund)?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 159—Mr. Sean Casey:

With respect to the considered cuts to Environment Canada: (a) which specific departments and programs are affected, and what was the process taken to determine whether or not to make cuts to a specific department and program, (i) what, if any, Environment Canada Research Scientists were consulted regarding the considered cuts, (ii) what scientists outside of Environment Canada were consulted, (iii) for each department and program specified in (a), what is the number of current full-time, part-time, and contract scientific positions, (iv) the number of full-time, part-time, and contract scientists who have been given “workforce adjustment” letters, (v) the number of full-time, part-time, and contract scientists who are going to be moved out of their current “job function”, (vi) what, if any, consideration has been given to shutting-down the Integrated Atmospheric Deposition Network (IADN), and if so, has the United States been consulted, as Canada has commitments under the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, (vii) specify all programs run by a single scientist who has been given a “workforce adjustment” letter, and for each program identified, what, if any, concern was expressed regarding the ability of the program to continue, (viii) the process that will be taken to place scientists in appropriate research areas, (ix) what, if any, consideration has been given to the fact that many scientists are highly trained in very specialized fields, and that an appropriate replacement position may not be possible; (b) specify all national and international environmental commitments to which Canada is subject, including, but not limited to the Global Climate Observing System, the World Meteorological Organization/United Nations Environment Programme Scientific Assessments of Ozone Depletion, which are

mandated by the Montreal Protocol to occur at least every four years, and hosting the World Ozone and UV Data Centre, (i) what, if any, environmental commitments are affected by “workforce adjustments”; (c) what, if any, consideration was given to the possible impacts of cuts to ozone research on (i) Canada's environment, (ii) the health of Canadians, including, but not limited to, non-melanoma and melanoma skin cancers, cataract, immunosuppression, and vitamin D, (iii) if so, what are the predicted environmental impacts, (iv) what are the predicted epidemiological impacts for each of non-melanoma skin cancer, melanoma, and cataract, and if not, (v) why not; (d) explain the advantages and disadvantages of both ozonesonde and Brewers, (i) whether or not the two technologies complement one another; (e) specify why ground-based ozone networks, and especially the ozonesonde component of this network, are critical for monitoring long-term changes in ozone, monitoring vertical profiles and tropospheric ozone, and assessing the link between climate change and ozone; (f) what, if any, research has been undertaken to assess what the loss of Canadian measurements might mean to the global ozone network, and the continuity, reliability and stability of the record; and (g) specify whether the oil sands monitoring plan announced in July was to include aircraft measurement, air quality measurements, and ozonesonde measurement, (i) whether any of aircraft measurement, air quality, air toxics, and ozonesonde programs is being considered for cuts, (ii) how many scientists run each of the specified programs in (i), and how many scientists have been given a “workforce adjustment” letter, (iii) how proposed cuts might specifically affect the oil sands monitoring program?

(Return tabled)

Government Orders

Question No. 160—Ms. Manon Perreault:

With regard to Human Resources and Skills Development Canada funding in the riding of Montcalm for the last five fiscal years: (a) what is the total amount of spending by (i) year, (ii) program; and (b) what is the amount of each spending item by (i) Technical Assistance and Foreign-Based Cooperative Activities (International Trade and Labour Program), (ii) Skills Link (Youth Employment Strategy), (iii) Consultation and Partnership-Building and Canadian-Based Cooperative Activities (International Trade and Labour Program), (iv) Canada Summer Jobs (Youth Employment Strategy), (v) Children and Families (Social Development Partnerships Program), (vi) Labour Market Development Agreements, (vii) Labour Market Agreements, (viii) Labour Market Agreements for Persons with Disabilities, (ix) Enabling Fund for Official Language Minority Communities, (x) Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities, (xi) Aboriginal Skills and Training Strategic Investment, (xii) Enabling Accessibility Fund, (xiii) Skills and Partnership Fund—Aboriginal, (xiv) Targeted Initiative for Older Workers, (xv) International Academic Mobility Initiative—Canada-European Union Program for Co-operation in Higher Education, Training and Youth, (xvi) International Academic Mobility Initiative—Program for North American Mobility in Higher Education, (xvii) Surplus Federal Real Property for Homelessness Initiative, (xviii) International Labour Institutions in which Canada Participates (International Trade and Labour Program), (xix) Labour Mobility, (xx) New Horizons for Seniors, (xxi) Career Focus (Youth Employment Strategy), (xxii) Fire Safety Organizations, (xxiii) Organizations that Write Occupational Health and Safety Standards, (xxiv) Social Development Partnerships Program—Disability, (xxv) Foreign Credential Recognition Program Loans (pilot project), (xxvi) Fire Prevention Canada, (xxvii) Adult Learning, Literacy and Essential Skills Program, (xxviii) Canada-European Union Program for Co-operation in Higher Education, Training and Youth (International Academic Mobility Initiative), (xxix) Labour-Management Partnerships Program, (xxx) Social Development Partnerships Program—Children and Families, (xxxi) Social Development Partnerships Program—Disability, (xxxii) Foreign Credential Recognition Program, (xxxiii) International Trade and Labour Program—Technical Assistance and Foreign-Based Cooperative Activities, (xxxiv) International Trade and Labour Program—Consultation and Partnership-Building and Canadian-Based Cooperative Activities, (xxxv) International Trade and Labour Program—International Labour Institutions in which Canada Participates, (xxxvi) Sector Council Program, (xxxvii) Federal Public Sector Youth Internship Program (Youth Employment Strategy), (xxxviii) Aboriginal Skills and Employment Partnership Program, (xxxix) Employment Programs—Career Development Services Research, (xl) Career Development Services Research (Employment Programs), (xli) Occupational Health and Safety, (xlii) Youth Awareness, (xliii) Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy, (xliv) Homelessness Partnering Strategy, (xlv) Youth Employment Strategy—Skills Link, (xlvi) Youth Employment Strategy—Canada Summer Jobs, (xlvii) Youth Employment Strategy—Career Focus, (xlviii) Youth Employment Strategy—Federal Public Sector Youth Internship Program, (xlix) Apprenticeship Completion Grant, (l) Apprenticeship Incentive Grant, (li) Work-Sharing, (lii) Small Project Component (Enabling Accessibility Fund)?

(Return tabled)

[English]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

COPYRIGHT MODERNIZATION ACT

• (1700)

[Translation]

The House resumed from October 21 consideration of the motion that Bill C-11, An Act to amend the Copyright Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to speak today to defend creators.

The massive use of new recording and copying technologies has caused major upheaval in the cultural sector. For years now, in sectors such as literature and the medical industry, for example, or even the gaming and software sectors, artists have been posting major losses in revenue, essentially because of piracy and illegal downloads.

Instead of lending an ear to the creators who make up the true foundation of Quebec's cultural industry, the government has chosen, once again, to try to impose a plan that will further reduce creators' revenues and benefit big corporations.

Quebec is unanimous in its opposition to the bill. Quebec's creators have condemned Bill C-32 and Bill C-11 with all their might, underscoring the inconsistency of Ottawa's position: "We recognize that music is worth something when it is copied to a CD, but it is worth nothing when it is copied to a digital audio recorder". Quebec's cultural industry and its artists are against Bill C-11.

Stakeholders have called for such essential provisions as the imposition of royalties on Internet service providers, in order to compensate for the losses caused by illegal downloading, but those calls remain unanswered to this day. Yet people across Quebec are speaking in support of creators.

Only 8% of music revenues are given to copyright holders in the music sector, while Internet service providers keep 83%. Since cultural products are attractive to Internet service providers and represent a huge portion of their inventory, it is only fair that artists get a share of the revenues generated from distributing their works on the Internet.

The National Assembly has unanimously rejected the government's bill and called for substantial amendments. Organizations that are well aware of the consequences of adopting the provisions currently on the table, such as the Barreau du Québec and the Union des consommateurs, have protested in similar fashion. Even the Fédération des commissions scolaires du Québec finds that the damage caused to the creation industry outweighs the benefits the Conservative bill promises to provide to the education sector.

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The Bloc Québécois believes that we must modernize the private copying system by taking into account the reality facing creators and other artists, so that they can receive fair compensation for their work. We must maintain the contributions coming from educational uses, as well as the royalties paid by broadcasters for ephemeral recording. Artists and other creators need this income. Without legitimate compensation, Quebec's creation industry itself is in jeopardy in the medium term.

By introducing a new copyright bill—which is a carbon copy of Bill C-32, a bill categorically rejected by creators—the Conservatives are once again showing their contempt for the vitality of Quebec culture. The Conservatives' bill forgets a fundamental principle: artists need an income to survive and to continue to create.

It is clear that this bill will make our artists poorer and will benefit big corporations. The Conservatives did not listen to any of the legitimate criticisms and are proposing amendments that would significantly benefit the software, gaming, film and broadcasting industries, at the expense of our artists' rights.

The Fédération des commissions scolaires du Québec said:

Accepting the principle that access to copyrighted works is synonymous with offering them free of charge would negate the importance of authors' contribution to our children's education, and weaken the school publishing sector.

The Union des artistes said:

The bill...does away with private copying and completely strips Internet service providers of any responsibility, when they already profit from cultural content free of charge. It exempts the education sector from paying copyright and kills reproduction rights.

• (1705)

To sum up, what are artists asking for? First of all, they want the government to implement a system of royalties on sales of digital audio players to compensate artists for their copyright. They also want legislation to prohibit illegal downloading of artistic creations, to amend the bill to ensure that educational institutions continue to pay copyright fees, to amend the bill to remove the YouTube exception, and to not limit pre-established damages. Artists also want to receive compensation that represents a fair percentage of the profits of Internet service providers, and to be able to distribute musical creations in exchange for compensation, rather than having them trapped behind a digital lock.

The Bloc Québécois would like to reiterate four important principles. First of all, it is not free. Artistic creations are not free. Creators, artists and artisans have created them and they deserve to be paid for their work, just as everyone else is paid for the work they do. We must encourage creation in all of its forms and ensure that artists are paid, that Internet service providers are assuming their responsibilities and that consumers can make copies for their personal use.

Second, we must support dissemination. Consumers must be able to take advantage of the increased accessibility provided by new technologies and artists must be able to take advantage of all these dissemination platforms. We must therefore promote the dissemination of artistic works on all existing platforms. Through its subsidy programs, the government must support dissemination via new media without negatively affecting conventional media, which are often where new works appear in the first place.

The third principle relates to increasing public awareness about the value of artistic creations. In order to protect against illegal copying, it is the government's duty to launch a public information campaign, targeted at youth in particular, to raise awareness about respecting artistic works and to explain that the law protects copyright.

The Bloc Québécois' fourth principle relates to cracking down on piracy. The new copyright legislation must also address illegal copies made by people for commercial purposes. The law should come down hard on professional pirates and known repeat offenders.

In short, the Bloc Québécois and artists want a bill that protects artists' copyright and pays them for their work. Helping our artists is another way we express our culture and the concept of our Quebec nation.

That is why the Bloc Québécois cannot support the bill in its present form.

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his wonderful speech. We know that the Copyright Act has not aged well and clearly needs to be updated. What would the hon. member say is the main change that needs to be made, especially in terms of piracy? The member spoke about piracy in terms of going to a flea market and thinking that you are buying a real copy when it is not genuine.

Does the member feel that that is the most important thing to deal with, or should we be dealing with the overall issue of copying and Internet piracy?

Mr. Jean-François Fortin: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his excellent question. The law needs to be adapted to today's reality. We need to understand that new technologies are creating a new reality in which creators' copyright may be infringed. Copyright must be protected and we need to understand that. However, in improving the law, we need to ensure that those truly guilty of copyright infringement—the pirates—will suffer the consequences.

The government needs to do a better job of targeting real copyright infringement instead of punishing creators.

[English]

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonaville—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, by way of illustration, one of the major issues that would come out of this would be digital locks. There is not a lot of talk about the cultural arts and how this would be one of the mechanisms by which artists could protect their crafts.

I think, quite frankly, that the government is focusing way too much on this digital lock idea, and, of course, it is really just favouring a business model. When it comes to individual songs right now, digital locks are going by the wayside. We can see how the evolution of technology is basically indicating that we cannot afford to have an inflexible bill.

Government Orders

I am not too encouraged by the fact that there will not be a lot of changes and that the government will not be open to a lot of changes when the bill gets to committee.

I would ask my colleague about the cultural arts sector in Quebec that he spoke to in reference to the money that would be lost from the use of this levy. The government has tried to turn the debate around to this iPod tax idea, but this is still a lost revenue for artists.

What would my colleague propose that the government do to help get some of that revenue back and help our most vulnerable artists?

• (1710)

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-François Fortin: Mr. Speaker, when we spoke about a levy on digital audio players, the Conservatives said it was a new tax. However, it needs to be understood that this is not a new tax. A tax is revenue for the government, whereas a levy allows our artists and creators to receive fair compensation in light of the new reality. With the distribution of digital audio files comes copyright responsibility. There is a clear difference between imposing a new tax and collecting a fair levy on the purchase of a digital audio player.

[English]

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was not going to participate in this debate but I need to given that the Bloc, the Liberals and the NDP have all commented on a copyright bill with regard to this idea of extending the levy.

[Translation]

My Bloc Québécois colleague calls it a levy.

[English]

It is astonishing to me that a member of Parliament would stand in this place with so much enthusiasm and speak in favour of something, the technology about which he clearly has no idea of what he is talking about. People do not download MP3s and burn them onto discs anymore. Therefore, the idea of an iPod tax or a levy for MP3s, which is what the Bloc Québécois has been proposing for years, does not work. How does his proposal work with Stitcher and iCloud and the new streaming media advances that are being made right now?

The Bloc Québécois and the NDP proposals with regard to the idea of an iPod tax, as we call it, or extending the private copying levy, make absolutely no sense whatsoever to anybody who has even the simplest understanding of how technology works.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-François Fortin: Mr. Speaker, I am still waiting for the question. That was more a statement or comment. What I have gathered from the minister's intervention is that the Conservatives, no matter what the vision of the opposition parties, clearly have an ideological vision. Hence, no matter what bill they introduce, they will defend it without taking into consideration the amendments or the suggestions of the opposition. Once again, the Conservatives do not understand the situation of creators. It has to be pointed out to them over and over again.

[English]

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise this evening to speak to Bill C-11.

There is no question that Canada's Copyright Act is in dire need of an overhaul to reflect and to serve the needs and realities of artists, creators, rights holders and consumers in the 21st century. However, on too many counts Bill C-11 fails to meet the task at hand and for every problem that it attempts to fix, new problems are created.

We in the NDP and Canadians across the country have serious concerns about the bill in its present state, and we look forward to working constructively with the government to amend elements of the bill to address concerns that Canadian stakeholders have.

As we know, the bill was introduced in the last Parliament exactly in the state it appears before us today. This is not the first time the government has done this in the 41st Parliament. Indeed, since the election in May, it has introduced several bills that have been virtually word for word the same as the bills it put forward in previous Parliaments.

It is a bit early in the mandate of a government to show inertia, but from the recycling of bills, the omnibus crime bill, the ending of the long gun registry and the recycling of Bill C-11, this is a government that has begun to run out of ideas already. By limiting debate and railroading committees, the Conservatives have shown that they do not have any ideas themselves, and they sure are not interested in the ideas of Canadians who want to speak to the bill.

Notwithstanding the fact that the legislative committee looking at Bill C-32, as it was called in the 40th Parliament, met with over 100 witnesses who all spoke about the many serious problems that existed in the legislation, the legislation has not changed. What is more, we hear that the government is not interested in any more input from Canadians on the substance of the bill, and that is too bad. The government is missing an important and historic opportunity to craft a made in Canada copyright act that would stimulate innovation in digital industries and that would truly protect artists, other content creators and rights holders and at the same time balance the needs of consumers.

While the government does not seem interested any longer in what Canadians have to say about copyright, it certainly cares about the big boys in Hollywood and New York who want Canada to toe the line, and a deeply flawed line it is, that creative industries and consumers toe south of the border. The government's anticircumvention position as it pertains to technological prevention measures, TPMs or digital locks, is a case in point.

Government Orders

I understand that if someone makes available thousands upon thousands of songs, movies, or pieces of software and is profiting from that activity, that person is clearly infringing on copyright for commercial purposes. Pirated DVDs sold on street markets or making semi-conductors specifically to allow gamers to hack their gaming platform to play pirated software are other examples. Someone is making money off of the blood, sweat, tears and creativity of artists and entrepreneurs, but the creators are not getting paid, and that goes beyond the regular practices of consumers to share and enjoy content.

However, much of the scare-mongering from major record labels and film studios unfortunately has tried to conflate the practices I have just described as the common practices of music and movie fans. This has led to the bizarre circumstances that we all know of, such as grandmothers being sued for downloading some tunes on the Internet.

The Conservatives could have crafted a Canadian-made solution to this very complex set of circumstances. Instead they caved to their U.S. buddies again. On the one hand, Bill C-11 finally recognizes common consumer practices which should be for the benefit of consumers and creators, such as time shifting, recording TV for later viewing, format shifting, as well as parody, satire and education as fair-dealing exceptions. On the other hand, all of this is moot if there is a digital lock on the content since that measure in the anti-circumvention measure that is attached to it supersedes all else.

What Canadian consumers win with one hand, they lose with the other. If there is a digital lock on a CD, they will not be able to make a back-up copy. If there is a digital lock on an e-book, they cannot change its format for use on a different type of e-reader. If there is a digital lock on a DVD, journalists will not be able to use part of it under the fair-dealing rights. It does not make sense that digital locks could supersede other rights that are guaranteed in the very same piece of legislation.

What is worse, not only do digital locks prevent Canadians from fully enjoying materials that they have legally purchased, they are also backed by incredibly unreasonable punitive damages with fines of up to \$1 million and five years in jail for doing something that, if it were not for the presence of the digital lock, would be entirely acceptable. It is beyond logic.

● (1715)

While we in the NDP have an issue with the practice of suing fans and suing consumers, I would like to point out that it is only the very large multinational media outlets that could avail themselves of this kind of protection anyway. For example, members of the Canadian Independent Music Association as a block represent 24% of all music sales in Canada, which is larger than EMI and Warner music sales combined and greater than Sony music sales. This organization is made up of Canadian-owned companies, mostly small- and medium-size businesses which include record producers, labels, publishers, recording studios, managers, agents, and so on. In other words, they are the heart, soul and bones of the English language Canadian music business.

Few, if any, of the member organizations could pursue those who under C-11 infringe copyright through the courts. It would be cost prohibitive for them. While executives at the big multinationals slap

themselves on the back at how compliant the government has been with C-11, the bill really does not help the independent music industry. It does not help the small businesses. It does not help the small entrepreneurs.

There is no question the music industry has gone through a very difficult time over the last 15 years. Therefore, it is all the more pressing that we craft copyright legislation that addresses the profound need to invest in new business models and innovation in the Canadian cultural industries. Instead, C-11 takes tens of millions of dollars out of the hands of artists annually by waiving the so-called broadcast mechanical tariff and by playing politics with the blank copying levy.

Prior to my election to this place in May 2011, I derived my primary income in the arts and culture sector as a musician, a songwriter, a producer, a composer, and a journalist. I can tell the House that it is a very difficult way to make a living and raise a family. Most in that profession work terribly long hours for many years and most barely earn a dollar. Having been lucky enough to make my living in the arts, I can say it is potentially a good way to get rich, but a lousy way to make a living.

With the arrival of the digital era many believed this would herald a new day for artists, a dawning of a middle class where it was not always a feast or a famine, where new revenue streams and business models would raise the average income for Canadian artists from below the poverty line to something resembling a decent living. That is what we should be striving for always. I think it is fair to say that that dream has largely gone unfulfilled. Writers still make more money slinging burgers than they do from their work. The average annual income of Canadian artists is under \$13,000.

It is important to remember that the spokespeople for the multinational music and movie businesses are not speaking for artists. They are speaking for their shareholders. Prior to the digital revolution, prior to Napster, BitTorrent sites and Netflix, artists were still struggling. Not a lot has changed for artists.

Let us be clear. Artists have always done most of the work and received the smallest share of the return. It was the same before the digital revolution and it is the same now. That is too bad, and Bill C-11 only makes the situation worse.

We know that Canadians support the arts and are willing to pay for it, but this bill wipes out \$20 million in annual revenue that goes directly to artists and rights holders by eliminating the broadcast mechanical tariff. Surely in the hundreds of witness testimonies on Bill C-32 the government heard that this would be detrimental to artists and rights holders. Again, the government is very in touch with the business interests of private broadcasters and big Hollywood film studios, but it is out of touch with Canadian artists and their audience, the Canadian public, who supports them.

Government Orders

Bill C-11 could have set an innovative and exciting course for Canada's cultural industries and workers, the artists who create the content, as well as Canadian consumers.

• (1720)

In its current state, Bill C-11 would fall far short of moving Canada forward into the 21st century. However, we look forward to working with the government on constructive amendments to fix the bill.

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as members may have heard, through the summer I had many meetings with a lot of different groups with respect to the bill. What I heard consistently is how important the sector is to the Canadian economy. It is a \$40 billion industry. Hundreds of thousands of jobs are created or supported through this industry.

The hon. member talked earlier in his discussion about debate, when he knows that this is something that has been before the House for many years. There have been thousands of hours of testimony from hundreds of witnesses, and hon. members of Parliament have been hearing the exact same thing.

He talked about the technical protection measures. In our neck of the woods, it is extremely important for those who create video games that there be technical protection measures that would support and protect that industry: Does he not support that?

Has he looked at other jurisdictions where similar things to what we have put in place in Bill C-11 have actually not limited the public's access to quality digital content but have actually improved it? Is the only solution the NDP has to continue to tax Canadians? Does he actually think the only way to support Canadian artists is to punish the artists and to punish Canadians and that a \$40 billion industry is somehow going to collapse under the threat, as he would project it, of a \$20 million levy that he suggests would no longer exist?

• (1725)

Mr. Andrew Cash: Mr. Speaker, I am a little surprised the hon. member opposite would just wave his hand at \$20 million for a sector where the average annual income is under \$13,000. I think the hon. member owes artists across Canada an apology.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonaville—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I actually agree with my hon. colleague from the NDP. Not only that, I would add that the Conservatives did not seem to flinch when it came to the money that was potentially lost from the auto sector. It seems there was very little debate there.

The parliamentary secretary talked about the technological protection measures, TPMs, and this model that is out there to protect all of them. I will give him several examples of countries, including Australia and the United States, which looked at ways of circumventing TPMs for the reasons of education. As a matter of fact, they went fully into using TPMs and digital locks but backed away on several measures simply because they were too strong. Therefore, some exemptions were made.

I would humbly suggest using something like the three-step process by which we can judge TPMs as a way of circumventing them for instances such as education. That would be one of the

measures. However, certainly he speaks truth to this matter by saying that it is just an all or naught measure that simply should be looked at once again, and in committee.

Mr. Andrew Cash: Mr. Speaker, there is no question this is a very complex bill. It is very difficult to balance all of the interests of all the stakeholders. It does Canadians no service to listen to this overheated rhetoric around taxing Canadians, taxing artists, hurting artists, and punishing artists. Canadians want to see some constructive debate. That is what we would like to see in committee.

Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we heard the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages a few minutes ago say that anyone who does not agree with him does not understand technology. I, of course, would like to comment on that.

First, people who are pirating movies are burning them onto DVDs and people who are downloading songs are putting them onto iPods. What is it that the minister does not understand?

My hon. colleague talked about a \$13,000 average income and making a decent living. What kind of missed opportunities does my colleague think there would be with Bill C-11?

Mr. Andrew Cash: Mr. Speaker, one of the great examples of innovation and a business model that works spectacularly is the collection of performance royalties by SOCAN. It licenses the songs. Artists become members and the organization collects that licence and disperses it to its members. It has worked for years and years and is a cornerstone of many artists' annual income. It is a very effective tool. It is one example that we would have liked the government to look at, ways in which we could license content and recoup it in a different way.

[Translation]

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, copyright modernization has been needed for a long time, especially to introduce the principles contained in the World Intellectual Property Organization treaties, which the Canadian government signed on December 22, 1997.

Since the comprehensive revision of the Copyright Act in 1997, the act has not been substantially amended because of the inability of previous governments, both Liberal and Conservative, to introduce a bill that would balance the interests of creators, the industry and consumers. Bill C-11, and its predecessor in the last Parliament, Bill C-32, are along the same lines. The government is continuing to stress access to creative content without providing adequate compensation for the authors.

The Conservatives took a stand from the beginning. They are firmly on the side of large content owners in the United States: the movie studios, record labels and video game developers. Unfortunately, consumers and creators will pay the price. Allow me to speak for a while about creators.

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The Copyright Act is the legal foundation that ensures that creations can be reproduced, presented and communicated to the public while guaranteeing proper compensation for their creators. To weaken copyright by increasing the exceptions that allow people to use creations without authorization or any financial compensation is tantamount to preventing creators from earning a living from their trade. It also does away with collectives. To weaken copyright jeopardizes cultural industries by cutting off their supply of creations and by preventing them from developing markets that meet the needs of consumers while protecting their investments.

Bill C-11 introduces dozens of exceptions to copyright, including an exception for broadcasting and one for private copying. These exceptions give individuals and companies the right to use creations without compensating the creators. According to the Canadian Conference of the Arts, the realm of new exceptions introduced by Bill C-11 will deprive creators of over \$126 million a year. The Union des artistes du Québec estimates that the cumulative effect of the exceptions will decrease creators' income by 70%.

We know that the arts and culture sector is an important economic sector. According to the Canadian Conference of the Arts, it generates spinoffs of over \$46 billion and provides work for over 600,000 people in Canada. However, without creators, the arts and culture sector would not exist. Nevertheless, the government insists on strangling creators by increasing the exceptions and failing to propose any measures that would compensate them for the resulting loss of revenue. This will have a huge impact on creators' ability to survive.

It is appalling to see that artists and creators receive only a small portion of the \$46 billion generated by their work. Artists in Quebec are the best paid in Canada. Yet, with an average income of \$24,600, they make 25% less than the average income of the total labour force. Their income dropped by 11% in the past 15 years, and now the Conservative government wants to impose its unfair copyright reform on them, which would deprive them of tens of millions if not hundreds of millions of dollars a year.

Meanwhile, despite the recession, commercial radio stations reported a pre-tax profit of 21% in 2009. They spent only \$21 million on acquiring reproduction rights, which is less than 1.4% of their \$1.5 billion in revenues.

Businesses have a right to earn a profit. However, creators also have a right to make a living from their work, and we must create a more balanced copyright regime.

If exceptions to the copyright principle are introduced, we must find another way to compensate creators. For example, some groups in the cultural sector have proposed extending the private copying exception to include digital audio recorders.

• (1730)

Instead of considering this proposal, the Conservatives preferred to stick to demagoguery. For example, they talked about a so-called iPod tax, when there is already a similar levy on traditional recording media. Furthermore, they were the ones who propose to increase the existing levies on cassettes, CDs and DVDs.

The problem with Bill C-11 is that it shows, once again, the Conservative government's contempt for artists and creators. This

bill joins a long list of initiatives that weaken the arts and culture sector.

For example, I remind members of the cancellation in 2008 of the Trade Routes and PromArt cultural promotion programs; the Conservatives' refusal to double funding for the Canada Council for the Arts; their attack on the CBC, an important catalyst for our culture and our identity; cuts to the museum assistance program; and Bill C-10, which would allow them to censor films deemed contrary to public safety.

Next to creators, consumers are probably the biggest losers in this bill. By giving unprecedented powers to major multinational rights owners, Bill C-11 will result in a situation where digital locks will practically trump all other rights, including fair dealing for students.

Bill C-11 could mean that consumers, for example, would no longer have access to content they have paid for. In one example provided to us, distance-learning students would have to destroy their class notes within 30 days of the course's end in order to comply with provisions in Bill C-11. That is completely absurd, especially given that these provisions are subject to fines of more than \$1 million and five-year prison terms. The NDP believes that Bill C-11 needs to be recalibrated to take consumers' rights into consideration.

To conclude, I should point out that this bill does contain some positive elements. Artists, creators and cultural workers in general are pleased with the amendments to distribution rights, performers' moral and reproduction rights, the longer duration of protection for musical works and the recognition of photographers' rights.

Nevertheless, Bill C-11 is unbalanced because it clearly favours the corporate sector. It needs significant amendments to meet the needs of consumers and creators as well. We hope that the government will listen to the artistic community, which is opposed to Bill C-11.

• (1735)

[English]

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): A couple of points need to be cleared up, Mr. Speaker.

First, the hon. member opposite said that our government had cut funding for museums. That is not true. We have created two new national museums, increased funding for existing museums and for local museums across the country.

Second, she mentioned PromArt and Trade Routes, two programs costing \$7 million. It cost \$5 million to deliver \$2 million worth of benefits. We eliminated those programs, took that money, gave it to the Canada Council for the Arts, which now has its highest budget ever. We have increased the Canada Council for the Arts budget by 20% with regard to copyright. Therefore, her facts are just wrong. I do not know who wrote her speech, but it is just wrong.

Government Orders

With regard to copyright, the only proposal the NDP members have talked about, and she mentioned it again and again in her speech, is the need to compensate artists, that artists have a right to an income.

The reality is the only proposal that the NDP has put forward on that measure is private member's Bill C-499, by the member for Timmins—James Bay, and it does call for a new tax on consumers. It says that people are downloading MP3s and in this transaction we need to tax that and that money should be collected into the private copying levy and distributed to artists.

I mentioned this as well to the member from the Bloc Québécois, but how does that work with iCloud? How does that work with streaming services? On the proposal from the NDP to compensate artists, even if one agreed with the premise, which I do not, how does that proposal work with streaming media? It is technologically impossible for the proposal of the NDP members to even achieve what they pretend it will achieve. How does it work?

Ms. Laurin Liu: Mr. Speaker, first, I deplore the fact that the Conservative government refuses to support an industry that contributes \$85 billion per year to our country's economy.

Despite these significant contributions, the median earnings of an artist in Canada is just \$12,900 per year, so these artists need to live off other jobs. It is important to encourage our cultural industry by paying those artists well for the work they have completed.

As for the private copying levy, the NDP's position is that we should update this levy to accommodate modern technology. The member should not just take it from us, but he could also take it from the Canadian private copying collective that supports our position and that represents thousands and thousands of Canadians across the country.

• (1740)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are a great deal of students across Canada who are quite concerned with regard to a potential impact of the bill if it were to pass as is. Would the member expand on this point?

For years, thousands of university students have done their reports and their studies at university. Now there is this whole cloud of confusion regarding what the obligation is as to whether they can retain their notes.

Could the member comment on the point that the legislation seems to imply that students will have to get rid of their studies after a 30-day period of time?

Ms. Laurin Liu: Mr. Speaker, we believe that copyright laws in Canada can balance the rights of creators so they can be compensated fairly for their work, while respecting the right of consumers to have reasonable access to content.

My hon. colleague cited the case of a student who would have to destroy documents 30 days after a course ends. On our side, we do not believe this gives students reasonable rights to access content.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to follow up on my hon. colleague's last comment.

In this bill students who take long-distance learning courses are forced to destroy their class notes after 30 days. Does that not create

a two-tier set of rights? If students go to a school in a city, they will have a certain set of rights, but if they are in a rural or isolated area trying to do long-distance education, they will be told that they have to destroy their class notes.

What does the member think the impact is on students across Canada who are trying to make the most of learning in a digital environment?

Ms. Laurin Liu: Mr. Speaker, I do not think we have reached a balance within Bill C-11 between compensating creators for the work they have done and giving consumers rights to access the content that they have paid for and that they have the right to use.

I would also add that we have a lot of support for our position, notably from Michael Geist who is a renowned technology commentator. He stated:

The foundational principle of the new bill remains that anytime a digital lock is used—whether on books, movies, music, or electronic devices—the lock trumps virtually all other rights.

This means that both the existing fair dealing rights and Bill C-11's new rights all cease to function effectively so long as the rights holder places a digital lock on the—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. We have exhausted the time allowed.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Montcalm.

[Translation]

Ms. Manon Perreault (Montcalm, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is difficult to try and understand an ill-conceived bill that does not really fix the problems in the current law. The Canadian government wants to reintroduce former Bill C-32 in the hopes of modernizing the Copyright Act. After listening to many expert witnesses speak on this topic in 2009 and after consultations, this government chose to table a catch-all bill.

It is true that Canada needs new copyright legislation, but this one is confusing. It contains too many major problems and, in certain cases, creates problems where there were none before. The government has managed to alienate intellectual property expert Michael Geist, the cultural industries, the Writers Guild of Canada and SOCAN, the Society of Composers, Authors and Music Publishers of Canada, to name just a few.

Reforming copyright law in Canada is not simple. It is quite complex. I greatly fear that the government's proposal is not the right solution. On one hand, the government is allowing for fair use for educational purposes, but on the other hand, it is imposing strict rules with regard to digital locks, allowing them to supersede all other rights guaranteed under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The Writers Guild of Canada has been very clear about digital locks: adding a digital lock effectively blocks the creators' current source of income and denies consumers the same rights they are guaranteed in other clauses of the bill.

Government Orders

The United States adopted similar legislation 10 years ago, and we have already seen the major shortcomings of such legislation in recent years. Their bill has reduced fair access to electronic resources, limited individual freedom of expression, legislated contradictory terms, resulted in unending and expensive legal battles against the public and has hindered innovation. Why is this government proposing a bill based on that same model? Canada should be a leader in copyright law instead of repeating the mistakes of its neighbours. Canada has to move forward and show leadership in this area, especially given the astonishing number of artists here who are brimming with talent.

The Minister of Industry and Minister of State for Agriculture announced that Canadians would soon have modern copyright laws that protect and help create jobs, promote innovation and attract new investment. However, quite the opposite seems to be true. Over 80 arts and culture organizations believe that Bill C-11 will be bad for Canada's digital economy. Howard Knopf, a lawyer who specializes in copyright, raises an important question. He says that this bill does not encourage innovation and that, in fact, it inhibits it. He wonders how making it illegal to bypass a regional code in order to watch a legally imported Bollywood DVD that is not available in Canada is going to encourage innovation.

The bill could seriously affect artists' incomes, even though they are already underpaid. A Conference Board of Canada report found that the cultural sector generated approximately \$25 billion in tax revenue in 2007. That is more than three times higher than the \$7.9 billion that was invested in culture by all levels of government in 2007. We must also consider that the average salary of an artist in Canada is \$12,900 a year, which is a pittance. This bill will deprive artists of million of dollars in revenue and jeopardize their market share.

Canada can be proud of its artists and creators. Why does this government want to penalize them? Does the government think that, with this bill, it can download additional costs onto artists, who are already underpaid? How does the government expect to create new jobs like this? It would definitely be more effective to examine the issue of job creation separately rather than trying to pass this incoherent bill off as a job creation strategy.

The Canadian Association of University Teachers was clear: this bill needs to be amended. The NDP is proposing that we delete the clauses that criminalize the removal of digital locks for personal, non-commercial purposes. This would easily allow people who have a print disability to change the format of electronic resources so they can access them.

• (1745)

What worries me is the impact that this bill would have on people with a print disability, which includes those with learning disabilities and those who are visually impaired. The accessibility of resources is clearly not a priority for this government. It is important to remember that, last year, the Federal Court ordered the government to make its websites accessible to people with visual impairments. The court gave them 15 months to fix the problem and we note that the government has only three months left. This is an example of the lack of consideration that this government has shown with respect to

the accessibility of resources. The hon. members will understand my concern about the plans for digital locks.

What also concerns me is that the government held consultations on the accessibility of library resources. For three years, the government consulted experts on the issue and listened to people with print disabilities describe their experience in trying to access resources.

I have the clear impression that the government did not listen to anything they said. This bill may actually create obstacles for people with a print disability in accessing resources. We have to protect artists' and authors' creations but we also have to be careful not to create problems for people with visual impairments. We must strike a balance; such a thing is possible. Unfortunately, the government did not do the research it should have when drafting this bill. It would be preferable to consider any amendments that could improve the legislation and make it better reflect what is at stake for Canadians.

Right now, Bill C-11 could have a number of unintended consequences, which is why it is important to consider amendments to improve the Copyright Act. One possible effect of the bill would be to increase the current levies on cassettes, DVDs and CDs, for example.

The bill could also create grey areas that would be difficult to manage and would require an endless, complex and inefficient list of exceptions. For example, the bill allows users to record television shows to watch them later but does not allow them to create a library of recorded content. What is the difference? How do we know whether two or three recorded episodes of a television show constitute a library or not?

Furthermore, is it illegal to transfer the music that we listen to on a CD player to a computer in order to listen to it on an MP3 player? According to this bill, the answer seems to be yes. However, according to the Conservatives, we do not have to worry because it is highly unlikely that the artist will sue us.

This bill creates all manner of difficult situations where judges will have a very hard time giving a ruling. This bill does not tackle the real problems faced by today's artists and consumers. In fact, it runs the risk of making things even more complicated.

I am asking this government to take our objections to this bill very seriously. I am asking the government to work with copyright experts who have identified serious problems with the law and to improve their proposals for modernizing the Copyright Act by taking into consideration users, artists and persons with a print disability.

• (1750)

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I congratulate the hon. member on her speech. She is perhaps aware that Conservative members shared their comments in a letter to their constituents stating that it would be acceptable to break the new law in order to circumvent digital locks.

Government Orders

[English]

Government members have apparently been saying that it would be okay to break the new law and to circumvent digital locks. The member for Calgary Centre wrote:

If a digital lock is broken for personal use, it is not realistic that the creator would choose to file a lawsuit against the consumer, due to legal fees and time involved.

In other words, he is suggesting not to worry about this, that the law can be broken and nothing would happen, that really we are encouraging consumers to break the law.

What does that say about the Conservatives' position, that they are telling Canadians to break this law that they have not passed yet?

[Translation]

Ms. Manon Perreault: Madam Speaker, I think I will quote Michael Geist, who said that the foundational principle of the new bill remains that any time a digital lock is used—whether on books, movies, music or electronic devices—the lock trumps virtually all other rights.

This means that fair dealing rights and the new rights set out in Bill C-11 are no longer in effect once the copyright holder places a digital lock on the content or the device.

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened intently to my colleague's comments.

I note that there are some countries around the world where TPMs are protected. We have not seen an actual decline in the availability of visual material in all of those countries, but we have seen an increase in it. I wonder if my colleague could cite one example for me of one country where there has been a decline in the availability of creative works because of TPMs.

Many opposition members have been focusing on the destruction of course notes for students. That is not actually in the bill. Students are not going to be required to burn their notes at the conclusion of their course work. That is simply not true.

I wonder if—

• (1755)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I would not want the member to mislead the folks back home, but it is in the bill. If he were to read the bill, he would understand that. It is on page 23 of the bill. If he were to read the bill—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member knows that this is debate. I would ask the hon. parliamentary secretary to conclude as there is little time left for a response.

Mr. Paul Calandra: I would like to respond to the point of order, Madam Speaker. One of the—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The matter is settled. This was not a point of order. Could the hon. parliamentary secretary conclude his response?

Mr. Paul Calandra: You are quite correct, Madam Speaker. It was not a point of order because the opposition is wrong on most facets of Bill C-11.

Could the hon. member cite one instance out of those 80 countries, where TPMs are available, where they have seen less creative work? Could she cite for me specifically where—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Montcalm. There is one minute left to respond to the question.

[Translation]

Ms. Manon Perreault: Madam Speaker, the NDP's position is clear. The NDP believes that Canadian copyright laws can balance the right of creators to fair compensation for their work and the right of consumers to reasonable access to content.

In other words, the NDP wants to examine all the amendments that could be made to the bill in order to create a fair royalty system for artists, as we have now. This bill would wipe out millions of dollars in revenues for artists. That is what we are talking about.

[English]

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-11, the copyright modernization act.

Without question, copyright is a very complex issue, and on that I think we can all agree. It is required as a balancing of competing demands of multiple interests.

At the root of this issue is the fact of unrelenting technological advancements. Therefore, I rise today to speak to this issue with some trepidation. I am not a very technologically sophisticated kind of guy. In the race to keep up with technology, my 15-year-old blew past me some years ago and has disappeared over the horizon. My 12-year-old has lapped me several times and now I simply marvel at my 7-year-old's facility with all technological matters. It seems like it is intuitive and, to extend or abuse the metaphor, I hear his footsteps right behind me.

My challenges with technology notwithstanding, I do realize and recognize that there are great possibilities and new horizons that open up to us on our current trajectory of technological development. These possibilities emerge from our ability to explore vistas that were not available or accessible to us before. Much of the broadening of horizons comes from our greater exposure to and easier access to the arts of all kinds, but performing arts in particular.

From this we all benefit. It gives us as Canadians a better sense of each other across this vast land with such tremendous historical, cultural and linguistic diversity. Collectively, it gives us a greater sense of our national identity and our place in this world. It gives us, as Canadians, an existential foothold. The reverse is also true. It gives others around the world a better sense of who we are as Canadians. For all of this, we should be thankful and understand ourselves to be in the debt of our Canadian artists. One asks where our creative Canadians are represented in the bill. Where in the bill do we acknowledge their role in our lives and acknowledge our debt to them?

Government Orders

In the answers to these questions, we discover the fatal flaw of the bill because artists are locked behind the digital locks that prevent the sharing of product and the opportunity to support themselves economically. What our artists need and what we all need is to take advantage of our technology to enhance access to creative products hand-in-glove with enhancing compensatory opportunities for our artists. The value of proceeding in this fashion is not just cultural but economic.

A 2008 Conference Board of Canada report found that the cultural sector generated approximately \$25 billion in taxes for all levels of government in 2007. This amount is more than three times higher than the \$7.9 billion that was spent by these governments on culture in that year.

The Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists, better known as ACTRA to many, estimates that Canada's arts and culture industries contribute \$85 billion per year to our country's economy. This works out to roughly 7.4% of Canada's gross national income and 1.1 million jobs, equivalent to about 6% of Canada's labour force.

In stark contrast, the average earnings of a Canadian artist in 2009-10 was just \$12,900, well below the poverty line. Far too many people in Canada's arts and culture community have no choice but to subsist, depending on the generosity of friends and family to get by. They are relegated to a state of quasi-survival that does not reflect the tremendous economic and cultural benefits that we all reap from their talents.

What we should be doing in the House is protecting the creator by providing him or her with a way to make a living and at the same time protecting the ability of Canadians, often called consumers in the language of this debate, to enjoy the creative product of Canadian artists. Instead, the bill seems to privilege or enhance the economic and legal position of content owners, not creators and certainly not consumers, because the bill does nothing to deal with the most troublesome issue confronting us under the present copyright regime, which is the digital lock.

● (1800)

Behind that lock is the artist's work with limited ability to get out. On the other side is the consumer who is limited by his or her ability to access the creative product. We should be facilitating cultural and economic exchange between creators and consumers, not placing barriers between them that will benefit almost exclusively large foreign content owners. It is backward and it needs to be reworked.

On the same theme that I began with, the democratic possibilities of new technology, I would like to talk about the implications of this bill for education. Our new technologies carry with them this tremendous opportunity for providing greater access to education by making knowledge and information available to a much larger audience. This technology is an equalizer of educational opportunity, not by limiting opportunity for some but by raising it for all.

However, this bill, again primarily through the mechanism of the digital lock, places in front of students obstacles to their education. This is most obvious in the case of distance education. It should be noted that distance education or learning is an important issue, not just because of the sheer vastness of Canada but also because of the

intensity with which so many of us live our lives and the convenience that distance education offers. It is also a huge issue because of the need for so many Canadians to pursue continuous education to keep up with new technologies and shifting labour market demands.

This bill would require that digital copies of educational materials for the purpose of study be made to self-destruct within five days. This would pose obvious problems for those pursuing long distance education, among others. In the case of long distance education, people in a remote isolated community would have to destroy their course materials within 30 days after the conclusion of the course of study. This is hardly an appropriate use of copyright law as these people would be effectively prohibited from having future access for reference or other purposes to content they have already paid for.

Further, with this bill, as presented, digital locks supersede other rights guaranteed in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, such as changing format in the case of a perceptual disability. Again I would argue that this is hardly an appropriate use of copyright law.

Under the terms of this bill, any removal of digital lock information would come with punitive fines of up to \$1 million and five years in jail. This measure is based directly on the United States' controversial digital millennium copyright act model.

In conclusion, I will point to some principles that should not change over time and should inform copyright legislation. One is that we need to value, treasure and protect the creative people among us. Their gifts are gifts for all of us and this needs to be recognized socially but, and very important, materially with appropriate remuneration for those in the arts and cultural community.

A second such principle is that education is critically important to us individually and collectively and, in all that we do, we should enhance access to education not limit it.

A third and very serious principle is the inviolable rights afforded to all Canadians by our Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

On all three of those principles, this bill fails and requires, as a result, significant amendment.

● (1805)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): We heard earlier, Madam Speaker, from a Conservative member of Parliament, a very intelligent person, who denied that what we all know to be in the bill was in the bill. I want to read page 23 of the bill, clause 30.01(5), which states, "the student shall destroy the reproduction", that is the textbook, "within 30 days after the day on which the students who are enrolled in the course to which the lesson relates have received their final course evaluations". That is black on white.

Very clearly, from the questions that we have been hearing from Conservatives, it appears that none of the Conservatives have actually even read the bill. This is quite tragic when they are supposed to be representing the interests of their constituents.

Government Orders

Could the member for Beaches—East York comment on the fact that the retroactive book burning is in the bill and on how surprised he may be that Conservatives have not bothered to read the legislation that is before the House?

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Madam Speaker, it is in the bill and, as the member noted, I commented on it in my speech. I think it is an egregious part of the bill.

I may be a bit of a nerd but I have retained and actually found quite useful for my speech earlier today my notes and papers from my course work back in university. I know there are others in this caucus who have commented on having that same habit of retaining these materials for a long time and finding them from time to time quite useful.

For all students, being able to retain notes, course materials, et cetera, that they have paid for is a tremendous advantage and only right having taken the courses. We all know that education is not inexpensive these days.

The provision read by my colleague about having to destroy these notes is something that I would like to see removed in amendments in committee.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windor, Lib.): Madam Speaker, a lot of the conversation earlier centred around the issue of the iPod tax, as the government likes to call it. We like to call it essential revenues for many of our artists and musicians.

One of the situations that we had just prior to the last election dealt with that. A lot of the media put that out as being just a myth.

What ends up happening here is that there is a relinquishing of revenues as a result of technology change. One of the things that we wanted to do, as part of the Liberal Party, was to provide that funding through general revenues.

Is that something that the NDP would consider in light of the fact that we keep talking about this levy? Sometimes a debate gets misconstrued.

• (1810)

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Madam Speaker, it is interesting that the levy has existed on other forms of technology that are now, in a sense, timed out, such as cassette tapes, et cetera.

We would certainly support moving that private copying levy onto new forms of technology so that we retain those levies for the benefit of arts and culture in Canada.

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier-Sainte-Marie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for another excellent speech today. He spoke very eloquently about the importance of creativity.

That said, the hon. member also spoke about economic issues. I would like to ask him if he feels that this bill is yet another example of how the Conservative government favours big business over small businesses. Artists are SMEs, small businesses.

[English]

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Madam Speaker, it would seem to be that this is the case, that once again we have Canadian legislation mirroring or mimicking legislation in the United States. It seems that it would be foreign owned and content owners who benefit from this copyright law and Canadian artists, who benefit us all so much, would be left out in spite of their very keen economic needs.

Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will take over my colleague's spot.

While I would like to commend the government for tabling legislation that seeks to bring about long overdue changes to bring Canada in line with advances in technology and current international standards—changes that New Democrats have been recommending since 2004, I might add—I cannot commend the bill in its current form, and will not, unless the government is willing to amend the digital lock provisions and restore royalty provisions for artists. The government has yet to create a copyright reform that would balance the rights of creators and the public. Rather, the legislation it has brought forward would satisfy the demands of large American content owners and trump the rights of Canadian consumers.

Canadians did not give the government a mandate to cater to the needs of already hugely profitable content owners while restricting the rights that consumers currently possess. They also did not elect it to waste time fixing problems that never existed in the first place. The government's own clause-by-clause analysis of the bill, obtained under the Access to Information Act, states that the digital lock provisions apply even when there is not an infringement of copyright and the defences to infringement of copyright are not defences to these prohibitions.

It is not hard to fathom why the government would not attempt to find balance in its legislation. We all know that nothing the government has done since May 2 has ever had anything to do with balance. In committee, witness after witness testified that while the bill brings to life some of the much-needed modernization of our outdated copyright laws, major flaws exist within these digital lock provisions. Witness after witness said these flaws could be fixed and that a balance could be found in the same way that many of our trading partners are achieving, including many European countries and now even the United States.

It is clear from everything the government has done since May 2 that the government is simply not interested in anything to do with balance. All of its actions and all of its legislation have been very obviously one-sided and, frankly, ideological. Nothing the government does has anything to do with consultation or with balance. One would think that it had a mandate from a majority of Canadians, but of course we all know that it has a mandate from fewer than 40% of Canadians. The majority of Canadians support neither the government nor its actions, yet the government has the arrogance to completely ignore the concerns of any Canadian who may question its rigid and inflexible agenda.

Ignoring the concerns and advice of witnesses testifying in committee comes as no surprise to anyone in and around this chamber.

Canadians need to know that the Conservative government is making a complete mockery of the time-honoured parliamentary committee process. Governments have used this process for many years to examine proposed legislation and to garner input and feedback from Canadians. This government does not want input and feedback from anyone with a different point of view.

Canadians need to know that this government wants to effectively shut down the committee process, and not just the committee looking at this bill, but most, if not all, committees. The government simply wants to act as a bully, forcing its narrow agenda on the Canadian public and on the majority of Canadians who did not, and do not, support its agenda.

What witnesses have told the government on the bill is that the provisions on digital locks will create problems, problems that do not exist now. They could have serious implications for many creators in the entertainment industry and also for students, who presumably, as has been demonstrated many times over, will have to destroy their notes after 30 days. This is insane. Frankly, it reminds me of *Inspector Gadget* and *Mission Impossible*, where notes self-destruct within 30 days.

It makes absolutely no sense that the government would adopt such restrictive digital lock rules, which have, by the way, been described as the most restrictive in the world. A more balanced approach is not only available but is being used with apparent success in most other jurisdictions. What is wrong with balance and flexibility? What is wrong with fairness? It seems those are rhetorical questions when dealing with this government, which knows nothing of the meaning of fairness, balance or flexibility.

It is clear to the majority of Canadians that digital locks as proposed in this legislation will have a devastating effect on our cultural community, a sector that currently contributes \$85 billion a year to our economy and supports over 1.1 million jobs. These are very large and significant numbers, especially in the troubling economic times we are currently seeing. Representatives from this sector cannot simply be ignored, but the government is doing just that.

• (1815)

The Writers Guild of Canada told the government that digital locks might work for software. However, from my own background in technology, I would take a different point of view and remind the House that locks keep honest people out. There is a way around every single lock, and I think the hackers of the world have proven that point in their attacks on governments and industry. If a lock is there, somebody will find a way around it.

Also, according to the Writers Guild of Canada, digital locks

are likely to be selected against in the open market as they were with music. They are neither forward-looking nor in the consumers' or creators' best interests. Digital locks, at their best, would simply freeze current revenue streams for creators.

That is pretty clear advice.

The Canadian Internet Policy and Public Interest Clinic told the government that:

Overall, these digital lock provisions are some of the most restrictive in the world.

Government Orders

To achieve a fair balance between users and copyright owners, the government needs to fix the digital lock provisions before this bill passes into law.

I could go on quoting from the cultural community, which told the government that it had a problem with the bill and that the government needed to change the digital lock provisions. Did the government listen? No.

It is as if the government is operating in a cone of silence. I would like to say that it is time to get smart. While we may not be using shoe phones, all of our phones nowadays do have the ability to download and receive copyrighted information. The levies and provisions that existed in former forms of media should be advanced onto the new forms.

The government has to start listening to Canadians. Trying to fix the situation after the demise of a whole industry will simply be too late. I call on the government to go back to the drawing board, rework this legislation and protect our vital cultural industry and the jobs it provides. If not, let us do it in committee.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have emphasized in the past a very offensive aspect that I think would cause concern for many Canadians. If the bill were to pass, it would by law prohibit post-secondary students, who have paid for their education, from retaining the studies and reports that they have done, as the bill has that 30-day clause. I wonder if the member would like to provide some additional comment on that issue.

• (1820)

Mr. Dan Harris: Madam Speaker, I would like to emphasize for the Conservatives that if they had actually read the bill, they might know that those provisions are in fact there. I think it is troubling that the parliamentary secretary did not know that this provision was in the bill. Conservatives just seem to be making it up as they go along.

Certainly with respect to the 5-day or 30-day provisions, it is inexcusable, given the tremendous cost and burden that students are facing to get their education, that they would not be able to retain that material and use it for years to come.

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened intently. Could my hon. friend point out for me the sections in the bill that actually refer to requiring the class notes of students to be destroyed after 30 days?

Also, has the member read proposed subsection 30.01(5) of the act, which talks about 30 days for the taped version of the distance education course that the student watches? After 30 days, that is what cannot be kept. Nowhere does the bill suggest that students have to destroy or burn the class notes that they have created while watching a taped version. The assertion is absolutely ridiculous.

Government Orders

I would defer to the hon. member's scholarly knowledge of the bill if he could point out for me the sections of the bill that identify that students have to destroy their class notes. He mentioned that it is in the bill a number of times. I will sit and listen and wait for the hon. member's scholarly advice as to where those sections are in the bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I would ask all hon. members to wait until they are recognized to make comments or to ask questions.

For response, the hon. member for Scarborough Southwest.

Mr. Dan Harris: Madam Speaker, I would first refer the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage back to my hon. colleague from Burnaby—New Westminster in reference to proposed subsection 30.01(5), which states in part:

However, the student shall destroy the reproduction within 30 days after the day on which the students who are enrolled in the course to which the lesson relates have received their final course evaluations.

Where did I say that they would have to destroy their class notes? Once again, the Conservatives are just making it up as they go along.

[*English*]

Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have a question for my colleague.

SOCAN, the Society of Composers, Authors and Music Publishers of Canada, said it believes that Bill C-11 should be amended in order to facilitate access to creative content via new media and to ensure that creators are fairly compensated for the use of their creative content via new media.

How will artists be affected if this delicate balance is disturbed?

Mr. Dan Harris: Madam Speaker, it will definitely be disturbed if artists do not receive the money they deserve after the bill is amended.

[*English*]

Certainly if the provisions are not carried forward to new technologies, then artists are going to suffer. As my colleague from Davenport mentioned earlier, currently artists have an average income of \$13,000 per year and cannot afford to lose any more.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Madam Speaker, the riding of Burnaby—New Westminster is one of the ridings where we are concerned about the bill that the government has brought forward, Bill C-11, which was supposed to be a modernization of copyright.

We on this side of the House, as a number of our very eloquent speakers have said, are fully in support of modernization in copyright law. We have said that. Our member for Timmins—James Bay, who was the critic in the former Parliament on digital issues and continues to be the critic in this Parliament, brought forward a whole variety of very positive amendments and suggestions to the government. As we know within the NDP caucus, one of the reasons we are 102 strong is that we did extensive consultations, which the government has consistently refused to do on this bill. We got from the artistic community, from those involved in digital issues, those involved in copyright issues, a series of amendments to fix this bad bill.

As has been the trend of the government since it was elected on May 2, since it took off the sweater vest and stopped talking about moderation and approaching government in a responsible way, the government has refused to acknowledge any of the concerns raised in the artistic community, any of the concerns raised in the educational community, any of the concerns raised across this country by members in this House and by many members of the public. It has not addressed any of those issues. That is why we are faced with, instead of a bill that would modernize copyright, a bill that would in many respects take us backward in time.

I have only a few minutes left, but I will be delighted to continue the discussion at a later date. This is a fundamentally important piece of legislation that has huge flaws, huge holes, and has been approached by the government in what is a wholly irresponsible way.

Let us talk about three of the elements that would take us back in time.

We have had a number of great speakers today talking about the impact on the artistic community and that, in a real sense, this so-called modernization of copyright for artists would take them back to the dirty thirties. That was a time when the artistic community did not receive the kind of supports for the works that it put forward to benefit our country, a time when artists basically were starving artists.

Subsequent to that, over the years, we have put in a variety of mechanisms so that artists could actually profit from their work. It is not a surprise that we are the foremost advocates for our artists in this House of Commons and we have a number of artists who have gone on to become members of Parliament.

However, the government is turning back the clock, ripping away those supports which the artistic community has and benefits from. As my colleague, the member for Scarborough Southwest, said just a few moments ago, the median earnings of an artist in Canada are under \$13,000 a year. For the government, in a mean-spirited way, to rip away the supports that artists have through its provisions in Bill C-11, shows to what extent the government is willing to turn back the clock.

Now, let us look at some of the other provisions that would turn back the clock.

Madam Speaker, because you come from a riding where there is a good sense of history, Victoria, British Columbia, you are aware of the 19th century and the paupers' prisons. Those paupers' prisons were established because there were draconian laws that penalized the poor, that penalized the middle class. When those people could not afford to pay their fines, they were thrown into paupers' prisons.

What we have here when we look at the bill, and I am going to reference it for the Conservative members who have obviously not yet read the bill, at page 57, it talks about the penalties that this legislation would bring forward. I will refer to clause 48, which is proposed subsection 42(3.1)(a), where it says that on conviction on indictment—that is when an individual is guilty of an offence through this bill that is brought forward—an individual is liable to a fine not exceeding \$1 million or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding five years, or to both.

Paupers' prisons and middle-age book-burning. That is how far back the government has turned the issue on copyright. Modernization of copyright—

• (1825)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member will have five minutes left for further comments when the bill returns to the House.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[Translation]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to speak more about the Champlain Bridge and public transit on the bridge.

As we know, the Champlain Bridge is federally owned but, clearly, the provincial and municipal governments involved want to see public transit on the bridge, particularly in the form of light rail.

We are being asked why the NDP talks so much about public transit. We currently have a national strategy. Bill C-305, which promotes a national public transit strategy, has been introduced in the House.

Why are we talking about public transit and, in particular, public transit on the Champlain Bridge? In short, it is because of the competition, the economy and the economic spinoffs that are generated by public transit.

What are the economic spinoffs for the greater Montreal area? Public transit provides 13,000 jobs on the island of Montreal and injects a billion dollars into that economy. The federal and provincial governments collect \$300 million a year from public transit alone. In addition, 50% of parts for the manufacturing of personal cars are imported, compared to 10% of parts for public transit vehicles. This means that 90% of the parts used in public transit vehicles are produced here in Canada, which represents major economic spinoffs.

There are other, non-economic spinoffs as well. Promoting a transit system reduces the cost of public transit. The cost per unit for one personal automobile is two to three times higher than for public transit. That is a saving of roughly \$570 million a year. Transit provides stimulus to family homes because it enhances consumer power and gets people around to major centres more easily and more efficiently.

There are many economic spinoffs related to public transit. We want to plan well in order for public transit to use the bridge and boost the economy in the greater Montreal area. We believe that, with a strategy in place, we can generate healthy economic spinoffs.

• (1830)

[English]

Ms. Eve Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise in

response to the question posed by the hon. member for Vaudreuil-Soulanges.

The Conservative government understands the importance of public infrastructure and making our country and our communities more prosperous, safer and more environmentally friendly. Supporting provincial, territorial and municipal infrastructure has been and continues to be a key priority for our government.

In 2007 we launched the seven year, \$33 billion building Canada plan. This historic investment represented Canada's first long-term infrastructure plan.

To protect Canadians from the worst effects of the global economic downturn, the government also launched Canada's economic action plan in budget 2009. This included \$6 billion in new funding programs for provincial, territorial and municipal infrastructure, such as the infrastructure stimulus fund and the recreational infrastructure Canada program. We also accelerated funding under our existing programs to increase the amount of investment that would occur during the 2009 and 2010 construction seasons.

Together with our partners, provinces, territories and municipalities, we have been able to make historic investments in infrastructure that are having a real impact on the lives of all Canadians.

Let me provide just one example of the difference we are making.

I am very proud of the significant contribution our government is making in public transit projects both large and small right across Canada. Many of Canada's largest cities, including Toronto, Vancouver, Ottawa, Calgary and Edmonton, now dedicate a very large portion of their federal gas tax funding to public transit.

As a former municipal councillor for the Region of Peel and the City of Mississauga, I can say that the City of Mississauga undertook its largest transit expansion in its history because of the dedicated gas tax funding.

Since our government took office in 2006, we have committed close to \$5 billion to public transit projects across Canada. This is an unprecedented commitment to public transit by the federal government. At no other time has the Government of Canada made such substantial investments in transit systems across Canada, but we are not finished. Under our long-term infrastructure program, the building Canada plan, funding for important infrastructure projects, including public transit, drinking water and waste water systems, green energy, national highways, local roads, and so on will continue to be provided in the coming years.

Adjournment Proceedings

In addition, our government has made and will continue to make significant commitments to cities and communities through the gas tax fund. In fact, we recently tabled legislation to make the gas tax fund permanent. As everyone knows, that is something municipalities have been requesting for years. At \$2 billion per year, this money will allow municipalities to count on stable funding for their infrastructure needs now and in the future. This allows them to plan.

The government also recognizes the need for future infrastructure support beyond 2014. That is why budget 2011 included a commitment that the government would work with provinces, territories, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and other stakeholders to develop a new long-term plan for public infrastructure that extends long beyond the expiry of the building Canada plan.

I am very proud of the unprecedented investments in public infrastructure that the Conservative government has made since taking office in 2006. We will continue to build on this momentum by working with provinces, territories and municipalities to address Canada's infrastructure priorities and challenges.

● (1835)

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: Madam Speaker, it is my hope that the government will not rest on its laurels.

The hon. member talked about the gas tax fund. Presently, the federal government collects 10¢ in gas taxes and returns 5¢ to the municipalities. I would hope that instead of holding on to that 5¢ it would give municipalities the other 5¢.

I was addressing the strategy and planning behind the Champlain Bridge. It is my hope that the federal government will work closely with the provinces and the municipalities surrounding the Champlain Bridge in order to do proper planning so that they actually have in place the transit system that they want. This will take a strategy, and so far I have not seen any evidence from the government that it has done proper planning in terms of working with the provinces and municipalities to offer an efficient, modern transit system.

Ms. Eve Adams: Madam Speaker, our Conservative government is proud to be making significant investments in infrastructure for our cities and communities across Canada.

Recently, our government tabled legislation to make the \$2 billion a year gas tax fund a permanent measure, as I mentioned. I would hope, after listening to the hon. member's passion for public infrastructure funding, that he would choose to support our Conservative government in ensuring that the gas tax funding is a permanent measure.

Just last month the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities announced that our government would proceed with a new bridge across the St. Lawrence River in Montreal to replace the existing Champlain Bridge.

We are also committed to the long-term future of Canada's infrastructure. Going forward, we will work with our partners on developing a long-term plan that addresses priorities and key challenges.

It is clear that our government continues to recognize the vital role infrastructure plays in the creation and protection of jobs, in building and maintaining strong, healthy and sustainable communities, and in strengthening the foundation for our long-term prosperity.

I hope that the opposition parties will see fit to support our government in these very important endeavours for the benefit of all Canadians.

● (1840)

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:40 p.m.)

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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, November 15, 2011

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer



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(Table of Contents appears at back of this issue.)

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, November 15, 2011

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

● (1000)

[English]

CANADA—JORDAN ECONOMIC GROWTH AND PROSPERITY ACT

Hon. Ed Fast (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-23, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the Agreement on the Environment between Canada and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the Agreement on Labour Cooperation between Canada and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

* * *

[Translation]

CANADA-PANAMA ECONOMIC GROWTH AND PROSPERITY ACT

Hon. Ed Fast (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-24, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Panama, the Agreement on the Environment between Canada and the Republic of Panama and the Agreement on Labour Cooperation between Canada and the Republic of Panama.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on National Defence.

[English]

In accordance with its order of reference on Friday, November 4, the committee has considered Bill C-16, An Act to amend the

National Defence Act (military judges), and agreed on Tuesday, November 15, to report it without amendment.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-345, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (special benefits).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce legislation that would amend the Employment Insurance Act to extend the maximum period for which special benefits for catastrophic illness, injury or quarantine may be paid from 15 to 52 weeks.

This bill was inspired by Natalie Thomas, a cancer survivor from Coquitlam, whose story touched me personally and made me realize the importance and necessity of changing the Employment Insurance Act. Another cancer survivor, Marie-Hélène Dubé from Montreal, has gathered hundreds of thousands of signatures for a petition that calls for these changes.

Canadians who are struck with a catastrophic illness should be focusing on recovery, not on how they survive financially. For families throughout the country who have been touched with illnesses, such as cancer, that is difficult enough to cope with without worrying about their medical benefits expiring. This is why I am introducing this bill today and I encourage all members of the House to support it.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

* * *

● (1005)

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if Questions Nos. 161, 162 and 163 could be made orders for returns, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Routine Proceedings

[Text]

Question No. 161—Mr. Mike Sullivan:

With regard to Human Resources and Skills Development Canada funding in the riding of York South—Weston for the last five fiscal years: (a) what is the total amount of spending by (i) year, (ii) program; and (b) what is the amount of each spending item by (i) Aboriginal Skills and Employment Partnership (ASEP), (ii) Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy, (iii) Aboriginal Skills and Training Strategic Investment Fund, (iv) Adult Learning Literacy and Essential Skills Program, (v) Apprenticeship Completion Grant, (vi) Apprenticeship Incentive Grant, (vii) Career Development Services Research (Employment Programs), (viii) Canada—European Union Program for Cooperation in Higher Education, Training and Youth (International Academic Mobility Program), (ix) Canada Summer Jobs (Youth Employment Strategy Program), (x) Career Focus (Youth Employment Strategy Program), (xi) Children and Families (Social Development Partnerships Program), (xii) Contributions for Consultation and Partnership-Building and Canadian-Based Cooperative Activities (International Trade and Labour Program), (xiii) Disability Component (Social Development Partnerships Program), (xiv) Employment Programs—Career Development Services Research, (xv) Enabling Accessibility Fund, (xvi) Enabling Fund for Official Language Minority Communities, (xvii) Federal Public Service Youth Internship Program (Youth Employment Strategy Program), (xviii) Fire Prevention Grants, (xix) Fire Safety Organizations, (xx) Foreign Credential Recognition Program, (xxi) Homelessness Partnering Strategy, (xxii) International Academic Mobility—Canada European Union Program for Cooperation in Higher Education, Training and Youth, (xxiii) International Academic Mobility—North American Mobility in Higher Education, (xxiv) International Labour Institutions in which Canada Participates Grants (International Trade and Labour Program), (xxv) International Trade and Labour Program (ITLP) Contributions for Consultation and Partnership-Building and Canadian-Based Cooperative Activities, (xxvi) International Trade and Labour Program (ITLP) Grants for Technical Assistance and Foreign-Based Cooperative Activities, (xxvii) International Trade and Labour Program (ITLP) International Labour Institutions in which Canada Participates Grants, (xxviii) Labour-Management Partnership Program, (xxix) Labour Market Agreements, (xxx) Labour Market Agreements for Persons with Disabilities, (xxxi) Labour Market Development Agreements, (xxxii) Labour Mobility, (xxxiii) New Horizons for Seniors Program, (xxxiv) Occupational Health and Safety, (xxxv) Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities, (xxxvi) Organizations that Write Occupational Health and Safety Standards, (xxxvii) Sector Council Program, (xxxviii) Skills and Partnership Fund—Aboriginal, (xxxix) Skills Link (Youth Employment Strategy Program), (xl) Small Project Component (Enabling Accessibility Fund), (xli) Social Development Partnerships Program—Children and Families, (xlii) Social Development Partnerships Program—Disability Component, (xliii) Surplus Federal Real Property for Homelessness Initiative, (xliv) Targeted Initiative for Older Workers, (xv) Technical Assistance and Foreign-Based Cooperative Activities Grants (International Trade and Labour Program), (xlvi) Work-Sharing, (xlvii) Youth Awareness, (xlviii) Youth Employment Strategy—Canada Summer Jobs, (xlix) Youth Employment Strategy—Career Focus, (l) Youth Employment Strategy—Federal Public Service Youth Internship Program, (li) Youth Employment Strategy—Skills Link?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 162—Mr. Rodger Cuzner:

With respect to Employment Insurance (EI) processing centres and EI call centres: (a) how many EI processing centres were there at the beginning of fiscal years 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2011, and where were they located; (b) what was the volume of EI applications processed at each EI processing centre for fiscal years 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2011, to date; (c) what was the average EI applications processing time for each processing centre for fiscal years 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2011, to date; (d) broken down by permanent and term, how many positions were there at each EI processing centre at the beginning of fiscal years 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2011; (e) how many employees in temporary term positions were hired at each EI processing centre to manage the anticipated increase in EI applications resulting from job losses during the 2008-2009 recession and the resulting Economic Action Plan; (f) how many permanent position and term positions will be eliminated at each EI processing site between April 1, 2011 and March 31, 2014; (g) what was the staff turnover rate per EI processing centre for fiscal years 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2011, to date; (h) what was the cost to train an EI processing agent at the end of fiscal year 2011; (i) what was the per foot leasing cost per EI processing centre at the end of fiscal year 2011; (j) which EI processing sites have dedicated staff recruiters; (k) what is the cost per EI processing location of staff recruitment; (l) how many EI call centres were there at the beginning of fiscal years 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2011,

and where were they located; (m) what was the volume of calls at each EI call centre for fiscal years 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2011, to date; (n) how many positions, broken down by permanent and term, were there at each EI call centre at the beginning of fiscal years 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2011; (o) how many temporary term positions at each EI call centre were hired to manage the anticipated increase in EI inquiries resulting from job losses during the 2008-2009 recession and the resulting Economic Action Plan; (p) how many permanent positions and term positions will be eliminated at each EI call site between April 1, 2011 and March 31, 2014; (q) what was the staff turnover per EI call centre for fiscal years 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2011, to date; (r) what was the cost to train an EI call agent at the end of fiscal year 2011; (s) what was the per foot leasing costs per EI call centre at the end of fiscal year 2011; (t) which EI call centre sites have dedicated staff recruiters; (u) what is the cost per location of staff recruitment; (v) what were the national Service Level standards for calls answered by an agent for EI call centres for fiscal years 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2011, to date; (w) what was the actual Service Level for calls answered by an agent, achieved nationally and per EI call centre site, for fiscal years 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2011, to date; (x) what was the annual percentage of EI calls made to EI call centres that received a high volume message for fiscal years 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2011, to date; (y) what is the percentage of EI benefit payment notifications issued within 28 days of filing; (z) what are age breakdowns of each EI applicant at each EI processing site during fiscal years 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2011?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 163—Mrs. Carol Hughes:

With regard to Human Resources and Skills Development Canada funding in the riding of Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing for the last five fiscal years: (a) what is the total amount of spending by (i) year, (ii) program; and (b) what is the amount of each spending item by (i) Aboriginal Skills and Employment Partnership (ASEP), (ii) Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy, (iii) Aboriginal Skills and Training Strategic Investment Fund, (iv) Adult Learning Literacy and Essential Skills Program, (v) Apprenticeship Completion Grant, (vi) Apprenticeship Incentive Grant, (vii) Career Development Services Research (Employment Programs), (viii) Canada—European Union Program for Cooperation in Higher Education, Training and Youth (International Academic Mobility Program), (ix) Canada Summer Jobs (Youth Employment Strategy Program), (x) Career Focus (Youth Employment Strategy Program), (xi) Children and Families (Social Development Partnerships Program), (xii) Contributions for Consultation and Partnership-Building and Canadian-Based Cooperative Activities (International Trade and Labour Program), (xiii) Disability Component (Social Development Partnerships Program), (xiv) Employment Programs—Career Development Services Research, (xv) Enabling Accessibility Fund, (xvi) Enabling Fund for Official Language Minority Communities, (xvii) Federal Public Service Youth Internship Program (Youth Employment Strategy Program), (xviii) Fire Prevention Grants, (xix) Fire Safety Organizations, (xx) Foreign Credential Recognition Program, (xxi) Homelessness Partnering Strategy, (xxii) International Academic Mobility—Canada—European Union Program for Cooperation in Higher Education, Training and Youth, (xxiii) International Academic Mobility—North American Mobility in Higher Education, (xxiv) International Labour Institutions in which Canada Participates Grants (International Trade and Labour Program), (xxv) International Trade and Labour Program (ITLP) Contributions for Consultation and Partnership-Building and Canadian-Based Cooperative Activities, (xxvi) International Trade and Labour Program (ITLP) Grants for Technical Assistance and Foreign-Based Cooperative Activities, (xxvii) International Trade and Labour Program (ITLP) International Labour Institutions in which Canada Participates Grants, (xxviii) Labour-Management Partnership Program, (xxix) Labour Market Agreements, (xxx) Labour Market Agreements for Persons with Disabilities, (xxxi) Labour Market Development Agreements, (xxxii) Labour Mobility, (xxxiii) New Horizons for Seniors Program, (xxxiv) Occupational Health and Safety, (xxxv) Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities, (xxxvi) Organizations that Write Occupational Health and Safety Standards, (xxxvii) Sector Council Program, (xxxviii) Skills and Partnership Fund—Aboriginal, (xxxix) Skills Link (Youth Employment Strategy Program), (xl) Small Project Component (Enabling Accessibility Fund), (xli) Social Development Partnerships Program—Children and Families, (xlii) Social Development Partnerships Program—Disability Component, (xliii) Surplus Federal Real Property for Homelessness Initiative, (xliv) Targeted Initiative for Older Workers, (xlv) Technical Assistance and Foreign-Based Cooperative Activities Grants (International Trade and Labour Program), (xlvi) Work-Sharing, (xlvii) Youth Awareness, (xlviii) Youth Employment Strategy—Canada Summer Jobs, (xlix) Youth Employment Strategy—Career Focus, (l) Youth Employment Strategy—Federal Public Service Youth Internship Program, (li) Youth Employment Strategy—Skills Link?

(Return tabled)

[English]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today further to the comments of the hon. Chief Government Whip in response to the point of order raised yesterday by the hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh respecting proceedings in the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, as well as the comments

Points of Order

added by the hon. members for Winnipeg North and Saanich—Gulf Islands.

Mr. Speaker, at the conclusion of his very lengthy submissions, the official opposition House leader asked you to declare proceedings on the ethics committee study in respect to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation to be, if I might summarize, null and void. In the alternative, he asked you to direct that the study be suspended for the time being.

From the outset, the core of my arguments will be that the request from the hon. member is premature. It is well established in the House that our committees are “masters of their own proceedings”. Following from that premise is the equally well established principle that the Speaker does not ordinarily intervene in committee proceedings.

The hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh referred to page 1048 of O'Brien and Bosc which refers to committees' as having the freedom to organize their work as they see fit and that these freedoms are not total or absolute. While I would agree that in certain situations the Speaker ought to intervene, the member did not present any argument that would meet that standard in this particular case.

That standard of intervening in the absence of the committee report might be gleaned, for instance, from the decision of Mr. Speaker Parent on November 7, 1996, at page 6225 of *Debates*. In that decision, a bona fide substitute member had sought to give notice of a motion at a committee meeting but had been ruled out of order because he was not a regular member of the committee. When satisfaction could not be reached at committee, a point of order was raised in the House. The Chair found that there was an evident breach of the Standing Orders in respect of the rights of substitute members.

It might also be worth noting that Mr. Parent's self-styled clarification and “statement” was made when the Standing Orders respecting associate membership in standing committees were only a couple of years old, so it was as much an effort to add clarity to what was then a relatively novel area of the House procedures than it was a decision to set aside a committee's place as the master of its own proceedings.

The bulk of the arguments made in the point of order centred on a letter from the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel, Robert Walsh, to the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay. While that letter delves into the *sub judice* convention, it largely speaks to questions of law about potential consequences of hypothetical scenarios that are not presently before us.

I would note that page four of Mr. Walsh's letter observes that:

Subject to my comments in response to your 4th point below, if the documents are considered by ETHI at in camera meetings, the *sub judice* convention would not be offended.

Points of Order

In his arguments, the hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh premised much of his concern around the notion that the ethics committee would not be successful in keeping its proceedings in camera. I would like to give all hon. members from all parties on the ethics committee more credit than that.

The NDP House leader cited a ruling by Mr. Speaker Fraser on March 26, 1990, which is found at pages 9756-58 of *Debates* and he quoted from part of it. I would also quote the following passage from that ruling:

If I am cautious in not acting now it is simply because the Chair does not supervise the standing committee chairmen. That function belongs to the members of each committee and they have obvious avenues to pursue other than invoking privilege in the House.

With respect to the facts of this particular case, the ethics committee, acting as master of its own proceedings, has passed a motion seeking production of certain documents from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation further to a study it has commenced in relation to access to information.

I understand that the CBC has complied in part with the committee's motion. Whether the CBC's response is satisfactory to the committee will be a matter for the committee to decide, again, acting as the master of its own proceedings.

Committees of the House possess the power to send for papers and records but they do not have the power to enforce an order for production.

Paragraph 848(2) of the sixth edition of *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules and Forms* tidily articulates the process here:

The procedure for obtaining papers is for the committee to adopt a motion ordering the required person or organization to produce them. If this Order is not complied with, the committee may report the matter to the House, stating its difficulties in obtaining the requested documents. It is then for the House to decide what action is to be taken.

• (1010)

I will revert briefly to my comment a moment ago about the ethics committee's place to decide whether the CBC's production, a voluntary response, I would add, is satisfactory to the committee.

Should the committee decide that the documents do not sufficiently answer the request, it can make a decision to report these facts to the House or it could decide just to move on and drop it. That would be yet another instance of the committee acting as master of its own proceedings.

I do not mention all these incidents of the committee acting as master of its own proceedings just for the sake of being repetitive. It is actually key to the point that I want to make.

Should the situation with respect to the ethics committee's motion for production of documents not be resolved to the committee's satisfaction through the corporation's productions to date, the only way to, for lack of a better word, escalate the matter further is through a report to be tabled to this House. To put it another way: in the absence of a report from the committee, there would effectively be a continuation of the status quo.

A report advising of the refusal to honour an order of the committee, a contempt, in other words, would undoubtedly be accompanied by submissions to you, Mr. Speaker, seeking a finding

of a prima facie contempt of Parliament and for permission to move an appropriate motion.

Alternatively, someone opposed to the proceeding might then challenge the committee report and the acceptability of a concurrence motion tabled in the ordinary course.

Therefore, I would submit that the appropriate time to be raising points about the proceedings of the ethics committee and how they may intersect with the sub judice convention would be at that time, that is to say, after any report from the ethics committee is presented.

Accordingly, I would defer making further submissions on behalf of the government respecting the *sub judice* convention and how it would and would not apply in the circumstances until a report from the ethics committee is presented on the circumstances, if one is even forthcoming.

To reiterate my earlier line of argument, such a report coming forward would be, I suggest, a matter for the ethics committee to decide acting as the master of its own proceedings. Whether a report will or will not be presented is not for me to say. After all, it could be possible, again, for the committee to find itself satisfied with the voluntary disclosures provided by the CBC in response to the motion.

The comments of your immediate predecessor, Mr. Speaker Milliken, in his March 14, 2008, ruling, at page 4181 of *Debates*, might offer some perspective here:

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary goes on to caution against presuming on the direction that the committee's study might take and jumping to conclusions about the nature of any report it might present.

I must acknowledge the validity of that argument.

There is one additional thought I would like to add from the 1990 decision of Mr. Speaker Fraser, which both the official opposition House leader and I quoted. The passage I cited earlier made reference to the committee as the most appropriate venue respecting proceedings in committees.

Later in his ruling, Mr. Speaker Fraser added:

I remind hon. members that endless points of privilege on what goes on in committee, when they fall short of that extreme situation where a Speaker might have to intervene, take up a great deal of time in this House.

That point is instructive in that it should put a caution on the NDP House leader's invitation to the Chair to find such an "extreme situation" here.

In the circumstances, for the reasons I have just outlined, this argument is premature because the Chair could have more relevant timing down the road to entertain these issues if and when this matter evolves through a report from the ethics committee.

To borrow from a common cliché, the toothpaste is not out of the tube here yet, Mr. Speaker.

To intervene at this stage would, I suggest, move the so-called line to eliminate what are the extraordinary circumstances when committees may not be masters of their own proceedings and, in turn, possibly lead to a series of other points of order striving to seek greater definition to where that line lies, in future cases, where the majority of a committee disagrees with the studies chosen by the majority for a standing committee's focus.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I would conclude by asking that you find the point of order raised by the hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh is not well taken. Given that the chair of the ethics committee has cancelled meetings on this matter until such time as you give a ruling, I would ask that you come back to the House at your earliest opportunity so that the ethics committee may take up consideration of the documents submitted by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

However, should the Chair wish to make a ruling on the applicability of the *sub judice* convention in the current circumstances and prior to the House receiving any report from the ethics committee on point, I would ask for you to indulge me or one of my colleagues in the government an opportunity to make further submissions on those aspects.

• (1015)

The Speaker: I thank the hon. government House leader for his comments on the issue currently before the Chair.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

KEEPING CANADA'S ECONOMY AND JOBS GROWING ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-13, An Act to implement certain provisions of the 2011 budget as updated on June 6, 2011 and other measures, as reported (without amendment) from the committee.

[English]

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: There are four motions in amendment standing on the notice paper for the report stage of Bill C-13. The motions will be grouped for debate as follows: Group No. 1, Motion No. 1; Group No. 2, Motions Nos. 2 to 4.

[Translation]

The voting patterns for the motions within each group are available at the table. The Chair will remind the House of each pattern at the time of voting.

MOTIONS IN AMENDMENT

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP) moved:

That Bill C-13 be amended by deleting Clause 162.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to address the issue of amendments to Bill C-13.

It must be said that, by proposing an amendment today to eliminate clause 162, we want to hold the government to the promise it made during the last election.

As hon. members know, in the May 2011 election, the government made a number of promises. Then, the Canadian public saw the government break its promises on a number of occasions. Here, on this side of the House, we think it is important for the government to keep the promises it made to the Canadian public. That is why we made this first amendment to Bill C-13.

Government Orders

What does clause 162 contain? As my colleagues know, this provision establishes a Canadian securities transition office. In fact, it ensures that the funding is granted to the securities transition office to begin its operations.

Given that the government promised exactly the opposite during the last election, it is our responsibility as the official opposition to remind the government what it clearly told the public prior to the May 2 election. I would like to quote the promise that the Conservatives made in their election platform—the same platform where they said that they would be moderate, that they would take care of the economy and that they would create jobs. They then broke every one of these promises.

In its election platform, the Conservative Party said the following about the establishment of a Canadian securities transition office: “We will not proceed unless the Supreme Court rules that this matter is within our jurisdiction.”

This was a very clear election promise. The government said that it did not want to proceed and that it would not proceed because it had to wait for the Supreme Court of Canada to rule on this issue.

As the hon. members know, a number of provinces reacted to the government's desire to impose something on the provinces that comes under provincial jurisdiction. And this reaction comes not only from the Quebec nation, but also from the majority of Canadian provinces, which said that this comes under their jurisdiction and that it should go no further.

The Conservative Party, when campaigning to become the federal government, clearly said that it would go no further with this plan. Now what is happening? This brick of a bill, which was drafted after the election, states the opposite: the Conservative government is ready to move forward, no matter how Quebec feels about it, no matter how the majority of Canadian provinces feel about it and no matter what promises it made to the Canadian people. It wants to go ahead. It wants to impose this transition office and it wants taxpayers across the country, from coast to coast, to pay for it.

The government made clear, unambiguous promises, saying that it would not go ahead with the plan. The Canadian people voted: 62% of Canadians said that they did not believe the Conservatives, and a tiny minority, 38% of Canadians, voted for the Conservative Party.

Despite these promises, the Conservative government wants to use this bill to go ahead with the plan. So today we want this clause to be withdrawn.

• (1020)

It is a bit odd that the official opposition, the 102 NDP members, has to force the government to keep its word. Normally, ethically speaking, when a political party runs in an election, it has to keep its word. Since the government very clearly told Canadians that it would not proceed with this, it should show them a little respect and honour the promise that it made, specifically, that it would not proceed with this and that it would allow the Supreme Court to rule on this matter and decide whether this falls under federal jurisdiction. The government did not do that.

Government Orders

It decided to impose this brick of a bill, which contains some things that we support, such as the tax credit for volunteer firefighters. We support certain parts of this bill. We will be talking more about them later today and over the next few days. There are other things that we do not support, such as clause 162, which creates a glaring contradiction between the Conservative Party promises and the reality of the Conservative government, which is not keeping its word. That is why we are proposing that the clause be deleted.

The report stage is an important one. Even the Conservative members would have to agree with me on that. During the last election, they campaigned on that very claim—that they would not go ahead with this. Since they promised not to act on this, why put these clauses in Bill C-13, clauses that go against what they promised in the last election campaign?

When we talk about Bill C-13 and those aspects that go against the Conservative government's promises, it becomes clear that the government was so concerned about ways to break its promises and to play shell games—on so many levels—that serve the Conservative Party, it forgot that its responsibility is the Canadian economy. We can see this in the numbers that have been released over the past few weeks regarding job losses. Canada lost 62,000 full-time jobs in October. That works out to just over 2,000 jobs a day, roughly. Every day in October, the Conservative government lost over 2,000 jobs.

At that rate, it being November 15, we may have lost another 30,000 jobs in the first half of the month alone, but we will not get the figures until the end of the month. We do not know because the figures the Conservatives bring to this House are inaccurate and do not reflect the reality on the street in terms of job losses. Those could have been avoided if this Bill C-13 had done what we proposed. It could have included investments for job creation, to help the middle class and the poorest Canadian families. If this government had taken action, we would not have lost so many jobs in October and we would not be in the process of losing even more in November.

Instead of taking action to create employment, which we still advocate, the government inserted clauses like clause 162 and thereby broke the solemn promises it made to the Canadian public during the last election campaign. For that reason, we want to get rid of clause 162.

• (1025)

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague, who is new to the Standing Committee on Finance, for his remarks. I would like to start by saying that everything he just said is not true. He repeated two or three times that, in the Conservative platform, we promised to proceed with the permission and pursuant to the decision of the Supreme Court of Canada. The Supreme Court is currently studying the matter mentioned by my colleague and we are waiting for its decision. The Conservatives continue to keep their promises and protect Canadians. I wonder if the true intent of my colleague and his party is to prevent the problems with the securities system from being resolved.

Why is he not willing to protect Canadians who are negatively affected by the absence of such an office?

Mr. Peter Julian: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from the Standing Committee on Finance for her question. She hurt my feelings somewhat when she said that we were not telling the truth.

I will have to quote from the Conservative platform. Unfortunately, we often see—I am speaking in general terms and not about the member in particular—that the Conservatives in the House do not do their homework and do not read the bills. It seems that they did not even read their election platform.

To help them out in this debate, I will refer to the Conservative election platform, which states, on page 20 of the English version: “We will not proceed unless the Supreme Court rules that this matter is within our jurisdiction.” In the French version, the quote is found on page 23. The Conservative platform could not be any clearer. What surprises me is that the Conservative candidates did not read their election platform.

• (1030)

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Burnaby—New Westminster for his eloquent and fact-filled speech. We can continue to talk about fact and fiction. Last week I heard our Prime Minister say on CBC radio that job losses in Canada were a direct result of the economic situation in Europe. I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about that.

Mr. Peter Julian: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord. He does a very good job in the House, which I admire a lot. He has done a lot of work, even though he has only been in the House for a few months. He does an excellent job. I wanted to make sure that I complimented him.

Canada has seen massive job losses. We cannot deny that. October was a catastrophic month for Canadian families. We lost 62,000 full-time jobs because of this government, which does not even want to take action. The Conservatives are so caught up in talking up Conservative policies that they did not even notice the job losses and the fact that the Canadian public is suffering because of the government's inaction.

We must recognize that we are influenced by global trends. We cannot deny that. However, the reality is that this government and its inaction have created a climate that, in October alone, led to the loss of tens of thousands of jobs across the country.

I must point out that, since May 2008, the Conservative government has created only 200,000 jobs, while the labour force in Canada increased by 450,000 job seekers. This means that we need a quarter of a million jobs just to maintain a stable job market in Canada.

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is an honour and a pleasure for me to rise to support Bill C-13.

[English]

This is a wonderful opportunity for me to speak to Bill C-13, the keeping Canada's economy and jobs growing act. I was happy to support the bill when it was referred to the finance committee for study earlier this month and I am pleased to speak to it once again.

Government Orders

Our government has introduced the next phase of our economic action plan, which keeps us on track to return to balanced budgets in the medium term.

This legislation builds on the success of our stimulus plan by creating the right conditions for business to create jobs and grow our economy through low taxes and a clear plan for sustainable economic prosperity.

As we know, these are troubled financial times. Mark Carney, the Bank of Canada governor and newly appointed chairman of the Financial Stability Board, warns us that Europe is headed for a second recession. Sovereign debt and the undercapitalization of European banks threaten economic stability.

While Canada's strong regulation and prudent fiscal policy keep us strong in the face of crisis, we are not an island. We are not immune. Global events demand sound decision-making to be certain that we do not succumb to the mistakes of others.

The best way to ensure that our economy remains productive is with a fair, efficient and competitive tax system.

Lower taxes support Canadian business by providing entrepreneurs with the freedom to grow. Reductions in corporate taxes increase incentives for firms to invest in new equipment, undertake innovative research and create high-quality jobs. That is why I am pleased to support Bill C-13, because it gives employers the advantage they need to keep our economy strong.

I am proud that this legislation continues to build on the success of Canada's economic action plan, especially through the support it provides for small business.

Local enterprise is the engine of our economy, creating opportunity not just for owners, but for those that they employ.

The government agrees with the Canadian Federation of Independent Business when it says that small businesses are indispensable in their role as job creators and innovators all across Canada.

To hedge against resurgence and global economic uncertainty, it is important that small businesses are able to hire new workers so they can take advantage of emerging opportunities.

That is just one reason Bill C-13 includes a temporary, one-time hiring credit for small business which provides up to \$1,000 against an employer's increase in its 2011 employment insurance premiums over those paid in 2010. This temporary credit will be available to approximately 525,000 employers, reducing their 2011 payroll costs by about \$165 million.

Again, I would like to quote the Canadian Federation of Independent Business which told us:

This credit will be a major help to small firms in growing their workforce.... This credit will exempt some small employers from having to pay premiums on an increase in their payroll in 2011 over 2010 levels. As an example, this credit will allow a [new] firm with less than \$413,000 in payroll to create one new \$40,000 per year job without paying any EI on that new position.

These businesses may be small but their impact on the Canadian economy is anything but. They represent almost half of Canada's

economic output, and we are grateful for their resilience in supporting our economic recovery.

Our government's support for the job-creating power of business extends beyond main street to a growing number of international markets.

Canadian business owners need the ability to compete not just next door, but with partners all around the world. We are opening these markets through an ambitious trade agenda, including mutually beneficial deals with the European Union and India.

To maximize the benefits of these agreements, we are improving our trade policies and regulations.

By simplifying and streamlining the Customs Tariff Act, we are lowering the administrative burden for business and government. Less red tape will result in lower customs processing costs for Canadian businesses, ensuring that they are more competitive both at home and in the global marketplace. Our government understands that Canada is a trading nation. This measure recognizes the importance of remaining globally competitive in order to sustain a fragile economic recovery.

• (1035)

While we have made great strides in improving our open and efficient trading system, we know that global competitiveness demands highly skilled workers. That is why the keeping Canada's economy and jobs growing act invests in education and training by making occupational, trade and professional examination fees eligible for the tuition tax credits. It is estimated that more than 30,000 individuals will benefit each year from this measure. This includes foreign trained workers who are often required to complete additional examinations in order to obtain their professional status here in Canada.

This tax relief builds on the support provided to apprentices through the apprenticeship incentive grant provided in budget 2006, and the apprenticeship completion grant, which was introduced in budget 2009.

Furthermore, this legislation makes important enhancements to the Canada student loans program to ensure that large numbers of full- and part-time students have access to financial assistance. We are expanding eligibility for Canada student loans and grants by allowing students to earn more money without impacting their loans, allowing part-time students to have higher family income without affecting their eligibility for support, and reducing the in-study interest rate for part-time students to 0%. These measures will save part-time students approximately \$5.6 million per year, making part-time study more affordable for more Canadians. Not only that, they will ensure that Canada's workforce remains highly skilled and internationally competitive, helping to lay the foundation for sustainable economic growth.

Government Orders

In keeping with our investments to strengthen our global competitiveness in uncertain economic times, this legislation offers targeted tax reductions to further encourage business to drive our economy forward. We are expanding tax support for clean energy generation to encourage green investments. We know that clean energy technology and innovation are essential to realizing economic opportunities, creating employment and enhancing the Canadian economic advantage.

We are extending the mineral exploration tax credit for flow-through share investors by one year to support Canada's mining sector. We understand the importance of promoting the exploration and development of Canada's rich mineral resources.

We are extending the accelerated capital cost allowance treatment for investments in manufacturing and processing equipment for two years. We realize that our manufacturing sector needs our support, now more than ever, in adapting to the demands of the recovery.

As recent world events demonstrate, there remains considerable risk and uncertainty in the global economy and too many Canadians remain out of work. For these reasons, the government is building on the achievements of Canada's economic action plan with Bill C-13, designed to secure the recovery, create jobs and preserve Canada's fiscal advantage.

The government knows that this is the right action to take. I urge members of the House, and all Canadians, to remember that the alternative, which is the NDP's massive tax hikes, would kill jobs, stall our recovery and set Canadian families back.

I will take a moment to address something that my colleague said earlier, something that was misleading to Canadians. When it comes to this Conservative government, we have made a promise to make sure that jobs are protected. We have made a promise to protect Canadians and we have said that, to protect Canadians, an office for a securities regulator is important to prevent things like the Earl Jones tragedy in Quebec. I would implore the Quebec MPs on that side of the House, who were elected by Quebecers who want this to happen, to support that decision, if that in fact is the decision of the Supreme Court of Canada, to allow the jurisdiction to be recognized by the Government of Canada.

• (1040)

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Madam Speaker, earlier, my colleague pointed out one contradiction in the Conservative budget, and I would like to point out a second. Lately, we have talked a lot about public safety. Just last week, in my riding office, I met with RCMP officers who are involved in a border pilot project. My riding borders the United States.

We are talking about creating jobs that, among other things, enhance public safety. My riding has been concerned about the closure of the Franklin border crossing for several months, if not years, now. The RCMP officer said that the closure of the border crossing is having a negative impact on the RCMP's police operations. There is also a portion of the riding that is not covered at all by the RCMP. As a result, contraband is on the rise and organized crime has moved into the area. Not only have jobs been

lost, but violence is increasing and there is a lack of security in this area.

What can the members opposite say to defend themselves? They talk about how good the budget is but they are doing nothing at all for the people in my riding.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her question. She is new here in the House of Commons. Those of us on the government side of the House recognize that police across the country truly trust our Conservative government. How do we know this? Because we have introduced a number of bills. For years, we have been introducing bills that aim to give police officers new tools and that also aim to help them do their work of protecting Canadians. Each time we have introduced a bill to protect Canadians and help the police, the NDP has voted against our measures.

I recognize—and I invite Canadians to recognize this as well—that there are Conservative members here, in the House of Commons, who are police officers. Eleven members of the Conservative caucus are police officers. They are here to provide information so that we can introduce bills that will help the police. The NDP has no police officers in its ranks. We will not be taking lessons from the NDP. We will listen to the police officers across Canada and those in our caucus.

• (1045)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin for a quick question.

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is clear, once again, that the hon. member for Saint Boniface is living in la-la land. She does not understand the Canadian economy. She is essentially talking to us about things that do not exist. She is talking about job creation, but since 2008, fewer than 200,000 jobs have been created in Canada. We are no longer creating 650,000 jobs. From the moment the recession began, we can say that not even 200,000 jobs have been created and many of those are part time. When we talk about unemployment and underemployment, we are talking about 1.8 million Canadians. When we talk about employment, at some point, someone has to “deliver the goods”.

You are not “delivering the goods”. You and your budgets are causing unemployment.

The Deputy Speaker: I would remind hon. members that they have to address their comments through the Chair.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Madam Speaker, I am a bit shocked by the reaction of the hon. member opposite. I can assure you he does not react that way in committee. I hope this was a momentary lapse. I hope it will not happen again in this House of Commons.

When we talk about the economy and the jobs that have been created, we have to look at the facts: since July 2009, 600,000 net new jobs have been created in our economy. Why? Because our government has created an environment that supports businesses and employers in Canada.

What does the NDP want to do? It wants to increase taxes on businesses across the board, which represents \$10 billion. It wants to double Canadian pensions, which will again affect our businesses with taxes that will be much higher, perhaps 70%, as the CFIB, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, has said.

Let us talk about what the hon. member said. He said we did not have full-time jobs, but 90% of the jobs are full time.

[English]

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure today to speak to Bill C-13, the budget implementation bill.

Traditionally, in this House, budget implementation bills are introduced to legislatively implement budget initiatives and, at times, include some of the failures of past budgets. Usually they are only technical failures, nothing major, but that is why we end up with these 600-page documents that contain everything but the kitchen sink. However, I think that is normal.

Usually there are two budget implementations a year and after seven budgets that would be about 14 budget implementation bills. However, the government, to date, is not willing to concede that amendments are an acceptable way in which Parliament can do business. The finance minister, even before appearing at committee, made statements saying that there would be no changes, no amendments, the budget bill would go ahead with what is in it.

The finance committee, usually responsible for reviewing the bill, hears from witnesses both good and bad things, and members decide whether a budget bill requires an amendment. They weigh the positives and negatives. Often there are discussions between government and opposition members and there would be some agreement that changes need to be made. However, once we come into the House and the proposed amendments are put forward, we see that government members no longer want to make any amendments. I think that is very sad because we just saw one particular amendment which I think is very positive.

[Translation]

With this bill, once again, the Conservatives are deliberately excluding low-income Canadians. Ever since the budget was tabled in May, the Liberal Party has been asking for certain amendments. The Conservatives are proposing measures like the family caregiver tax credit, the volunteer firefighters tax credit and the children's arts tax credit. How can low-income families and individuals benefit from a non-refundable tax credit when, quite often, they do not have enough income to be taxed? Why did the Conservatives decide to exclude the most vulnerable among us, at a time when the economy is so precarious?

The current economic situation is not the same as it was a few years ago or even a few months ago. I do not understand why this government will not be a little more flexible and make these tax credits refundable. For instance, if someone leaves their job to care for a loved one at home, how can they benefit from a tax credit when they no longer have an income? If they have left their job, it means they no longer have an income. That is just one example, among many others, of how these proposed measures will not benefit those who need them most. If someone is not working full time and does

not earn enough money to be taxed, how can they benefit from these tax credits?

Some members from western and eastern Canada have many volunteer firefighters in their ridings, especially in rural areas where most firefighters are volunteers. Some of them are retired.

• (1050)

[English]

While I was on the finance committee, many volunteer firefighters came before it. They said that they became volunteer firefighters to contribute to their community. It was not for pay because they were not getting paid. They spent time in training and ensuring that everything was functional in case there would be a fire. All they wanted was a credit to put back in their pockets a little bit of the money that they spent getting to the fire station and on these inspections.

Here we have a great initiative that the government introduced. Some of these volunteer firemen have given up their time, they may be retired or low income, but we cannot even get money back in their pockets to pay them for some of the gas expenses they incurred in getting to do their volunteer work. It would be appropriate for the government to reconsider and make these credits refundable instead of non-refundable. However, again, the Conservatives are playing politics.

[Translation]

They have decided to play petty politics by not making these tax credits refundable, which would enable low-income Canadians to benefit as well, as we have suggested a number of times. This shows once again that the Conservative government is ignoring Canadians in need.

The Liberal Party would like to work with the government to improve this bill. However, it realizes that the Conservatives never listen to the advice of this House or the Canadian public in general. This government must start tackling the problems faced by Canadians rather than trying to pit the people against one another. A responsible government would not choose the winners and the losers, as it is currently doing. It would not choose to ignore a large part of the population. It would not choose ideology over facts and reason.

[English]

There are some good measures in the budget such as the mining and exploration tax credit. However, it has only been extended for one year and it is temporary. Therefore, mining companies that need to make decisions over a five to ten year period are not sure how long they can rely on this tax credit.

Government Orders

There is the extension of the accelerated capital cost allowance. It is a great initiative and something that has been done for the last couple of years. However, the government has extended it for only two years. The productivity of companies in Canada is one of the lowest in the world because they cannot plan for the future. As a member of the finance committee for many years, we kept hearing that companies not only need the accelerated capital cost allowance but also need to know how long it will be effective for because if they are to invest in capital equipment, the investment into this heavy equipment would take a period of five to ten years to pay off. Therefore, it is a good initiative but not good on the follow through.

We talked about the amendment from the NDP. It no longer wants to authorize or provide the government with the \$30-odd million for a transitional office for the national securities regulator. All members in the House agreed to wait for the Supreme Court ruling. Instead, the government decided to give \$33-odd million to a transitory office rather than wait for the ruling from the Supreme Court on whether the national securities regulator will be accepted or not. We are throwing away money, which we could use for other purposes, on friends of the Prime Minister, when all these professionals are sitting there waiting for a ruling from the Supreme Court.

There is the hiring credit for small businesses. On the one hand, the government is increasing EI premiums. If we add that up over the next year, it will be bringing over \$1 billion into the government coffers and over the next couple of years it will be in the billions of dollars. Meanwhile, it is providing credits worth \$135 million to small businesses if they hire an extra person. However, to get this credit they can only hire an extra person if they have less than 10 people whereas the majority of small and medium-size businesses have more than 10 employees. Therefore, this credit will only be made available to a small portion of employers.

Another problem is that the credit is only worth \$1,000 and businesses can only apply for the credit at the end of the year, after they have paid the increased EI premiums on a monthly basis. I find that unacceptable.

Again, we are looking to see if the government is willing to accept some amendments and increase the hiring tax credit for small businesses to include some medium-size businesses that have between 20 to 50 employees.

I will end here with the gas tax which was introduced by the previous Liberal government. It was based on a percentage of the GST. Again, the government is capping it instead of putting a minimum. If the amount of the GST collected increases, why would the municipalities not be entitled to receive their fair share? We do not understand why there should be a ceiling instead of it continuing to be a percentage of the gas tax collected.

I look forward to any questions.

• (1055)

Mr. Corneliu Chisu (Pickering—Scarborough East, CPC): Madam Speaker, first I will take this opportunity to thank my constituents in Pickering—Scarborough East for the trust bestowed on me to represent them here in the House.

The particularity of this riding is that it encompasses two cities united by diversity and the 416 and 905 phone codes. One is the largest in Canada, Toronto, and the other, the city of Pickering, is much smaller.

Dividing and at the same time uniting the communities in my riding is the magnificent Rouge River, with its unique park containing unique biodiversity, such as the remnants of the Carolinian boreal forest. The Rouge Park will soon become the first urban national park in North America with 20% of the Canadian population in its immediate proximity.

My riding also has the Pickering nuclear power plant and several strongly research-oriented establishments such as the University of Toronto Scarborough Campus, Centennial College and companies such as Purdue Pharmaceuticals and others on the high technology end.

Certainly we need more in the future. In this context, I am delighted on behalf of my constituents to speak in support of Bill C-13. The bill provides the means to continue the recovery and the stability phase of our economy in these complicated world circumstances. It is very important for my constituents in Pickering—Scarborough East. Availability of jobs, economic stability and growth are important for the families in my riding.

Our responsible Conservative government continues to be focused on what matters to Canadians: creating jobs and promoting economic stability and growth. Canada is recognized to have the strongest job growth record in the G7, with nearly 600,000 net new jobs created since July 2009, and the International Monetary Fund projects that we will have among the strongest economic growth in the G7 over the next two years. However, we are not immune to global economic turbulence. That is why we need to stay the course and implement the next phase of Canada's economic action plan.

Bill C-13 supports Canada's economic recovery and outlines a vision for the future by proposing action on the following pillars of good governance and stability: promoting job creation and economic growth, supporting communities, helping families, investing in education and training and respecting taxpayers.

To promote job creation and economic growth, the bill will provide a temporary hiring credit for small business to encourage additional hiring, expand tax support for clean energy generation to encourage green investments, extend the mineral exploration tax credit for flow-through share investors by one year to support Canada's mining sector, simplify customs tariffs in order to facilitate trade and lower the administrative burden for businesses, extend the accelerated capital cost allowance treatment for investments in manufacturing and processing machinery and equipment for two years to support the manufacturing and processing sector and eliminate the mandatory retirement age for federally regulated employees in order to give older workers wishing to work the option of remaining in the workforce.

Being an engineer with extensive Canadian and international experience in both public and private service, I know well that the creation of a safe, secure and inviting environment for business is paramount for economic development.

To support communities, the bill would legislate permanent gas tax funding for municipalities, putting into law the permanent annual investment of \$2 billion in gas tax funding for cities and towns to support infrastructure priorities.

This provision is of utmost importance for our infrastructure. It provides for payments to be made to provinces, territories, municipalities, first nations and other entities for municipal infrastructure improvements on a continuous basis, and it is predictable.

The bill would enhance the wage earner protection program to cover more workers affected by employer bankruptcy or receivership.

It would increase the ability of Canadians to give more confidently to legitimate charities by introducing a package of integrity measures designed to help combat fraud and other forms of abuse.

To help families, the bill introduces a new family caregiver tax credit to assist caregivers of all types of infirm dependent relatives. It would remove the limit on the amount of eligible expenses caregivers can claim under the medical expense tax credit in respect of financially dependent relatives. It introduces a new children's arts tax credit for programs associated with children's artistic, cultural, recreational and developmental activities.

● (1100)

It introduces a volunteer firefighters tax credit to allow eligible volunteer firefighters to claim 15% of non-refundable tax credits based on an amount of \$3,000.

To invest in education and training, the bill would forgive loans for new doctors and nurses in underserved rural and remote areas. It would help apprentices in the skilled trades and workers in regulated professions by making operational, trade and professional examination fees eligible for the tuition tax credit. As a member of the regulated profession of engineering myself, I know the cost of annual fees and certification examinations.

I take this opportunity to cite some of the remarks from my professional bodies.

Engineers Canada states:

Making professional examination fees eligible for the Tuition Tax Credit... demonstrates a real commitment to fostering the highly-skilled and qualified talent the country needs to compete....

It further states:

It will help in the pursuit of a strong, diverse, and modern economy.

Polytechnics Canada says that it:

...welcomes the 2011 federal budget for its recognition of the role our members play in advancing innovation through applied research and commercialization activities.

It further states:

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These budget measures demonstrate ways to use existing programs with modest new investment to encourage Canadian SMEs to generate smart, long-lasting jobs.

The bill would improve federal financial assistance for students. It would make it easier to allocate registered education savings plan assets among siblings without incurring tax penalties or forfeiting Canada education savings grants.

Finally, the bill respects taxpayers. It would phase out the direct subsidy of political parties. It would close numerous tax loopholes that allow a few businesses and individuals to avoid paying their fair share of tax. My constituents especially like this provision.

In conclusion, I encourage my colleagues from the opposition to support this bill. It is good for our country in our common quest to keep Canada as the best place in the world to live.

● (1105)

[Translation]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Madam Speaker, this fall I met with other mayors in my riding, including the mayor of Sainte-Rose-du-Nord, who spoke to me about a problem in his municipality: the lack of federal investment in infrastructure for small municipalities. The needs of this municipality are great.

This mayor talked about the problem of his municipality's waste water which, at present, is dumped into the fjord—into the Saguenay marine park. The marine park is a federal organization that protects these waters. The mayor asked me to voice his concerns in Ottawa and to ask the federal government to invest in infrastructure for his municipality. I was disappointed to find that this bill does not provide for infrastructure investments. We know that the government's borrowing costs are at a historic low. This is an opportune time to invest in small municipalities that have major infrastructure needs.

Will the government finally invest in infrastructure for small municipalities?

[English]

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: Madam Speaker, it is an excellent question.

We would make the tax credit for the gas fund permanent so that municipalities can plan for their priorities. The provinces are also involved. Basically, the federal government would provide the funding but would not manage the projects. It is up to the municipalities to ask for the projects and to see what their priorities are.

I understand that the infrastructure problem is a great problem. However, this \$2 billion has been allocated; before, it was nothing, so it is still great progress.

[Translation]

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague. To begin, I heard a comment earlier that I did not think was very fair. I am also new in the House and I was fortunate enough not to be caught up in corruption. I think that is something that works in our favour.

Government Orders

In the Haute-Côte-Nord region, in my riding, the unemployment rate is over 10%. Measures were cut, but there was nothing to make up for the cuts. What is being done for the silviculture, forestry and fishery industries? What is being done to take into account the realities in the regions? Not much.

If the government wants to give power to the regions, it will have to work with them, because right now, that is not one of its strengths. There is also talk of the oil pipeline right now. There were refinery closures in Quebec. It would be nice to keep jobs here. I have to wonder where the Conservative Party's interests are. I get the impression that they are in the pockets of their party supporters.

Mr. Cornéliu Chisu: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. I will answer in English.

[English]

This is a complicated issue and I cannot resolve it for the member today.

However, our government is providing more of the tools for resolving the issues of the country. As for the member's situation, I do not know many details, but I think our government is on its way to caring for all Canadians, not only those in Conservative ridings. We are here to govern and to govern in a responsible way.

• (1110)

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my first comment about Bill C-13 pertains to its omnibus nature.

Parts of this bill would have been worth examining separately and in more depth. The creation of a Canadian securities commission is one of them. The creation of such an institution deserved a higher level of debate, a more heartfelt, thorough and better documented debate. The government killed debate on this issue by introducing a resolution on the funding of this institution as part of an omnibus bill that contained so many elements and so many chapters that it was impossible to figure out. This issue was addressed in just one of over 150 chapters. That is unacceptable. This is important legislation that will play a key role in Canada's economic future and constitution, and the government excluded it from debate by quietly slipping it into an omnibus bill. This is clearly yet another democratic deficit.

We could say the same about the reform of financing for political parties. Was it truly the Standing Committee on Finance that should have considered this key element of the bill? There are committees that deal exclusively with the Canada Elections Act. The Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics could have identified this as an essential element of the bill and discussed only this reform. However, such was not the case.

Once again, the Conservative government is misusing omnibus bills. We find ourselves with elements buried in a mountain of tax measures that are detailed and difficult to understand. Yet, that particular element would have been worth debating on its own, because it concerns the future of democracy in this country, the future of political party funding and the possibility of creating new political parties. There is no talk of that; it is all about money, not democracy. Is there anything more fundamental to democracy than a country's election legislation?

That is the whole problem with this government that does not want debate, that does not want to discuss key issues and that keeps on introducing omnibus bills to deny Canadians their right to discuss things that are essential to their everyday lives.

There is another difficult element in this bill. The Conservatives are once again making use of non-refundable tax credits. That is a problem for people who do not have enough income, who do not pay income tax because they are very poor or because they are retired. For a variety of reasons, these people will never be able to access these tax credits. That is a major tax inequity. These people are unable to access existing credits that could be refundable. But the government is not taking that step and it is indicating that these tax credits will be non-refundable.

Since the Conservatives came to power, we have noticed a growing gap between the rich and the poor in Canada. This is one of the things that is exacerbating this poverty. They are not considering the people who earn less than \$15,000 a year, and there are many such people. These people are entitled to a great number of things as well.

We could also talk about the people with ailing children or spouses. Illness in the family has a major impact on the family income. We see tax credits for family caregivers that do not do enough to support those who take leave to care for their loved ones. It is not adequate income. It is not enough. The government has come up with a fine and noble measure with no income and no impact.

• (1115)

We do not see what this measure will achieve. You do things for media attention only. They look good, but they lack substance. They only look good on paper. The best example is the non-refundable tax credits. You are not giving enough. You are not proposing a structured and organized national policy to allow people to stay at home to take care of their ailing loved ones. You are only making a speech and throwing a bit of money around, saying how wonderful it is that you are helping family caregivers. That is not what it means to help people.

There is absolutely nothing to help people in one of the first clauses of Part 1, which deals with family caregivers. First of all, caregivers will receive a credit provided they earn income. Second, it is not enough and does not meet their needs. You say that you will give them something for looking after their family members, but it is not enough money to allow them to live with dignity and not in poverty. Clearly, you accept that some Canadians are poor. You accept the unacceptable. That is the major difference between the Conservative Party and the NDP. That shows that we will govern on behalf of Canadians and that you will govern on behalf of your big business friends.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I would ask the hon. member to direct his comments to the Chair.

Mr. Alain Giguère: Madam Speaker, of course. Thank you for the reminder.

As for the 85,000 volunteer firefighters, the government announced that the budget envelope to support them was about \$15 million. The conditions are that they must work more than 200 hours as volunteer firefighters and they cannot be on the municipality's payroll. This reduces the number of firefighters eligible for the credit by 35% to 65%. The \$15 million shared by 50,000 volunteer firefighters amounts to \$300 each.

Does anyone here actually think that volunteer firefighters work for \$300? Their motivation is not that \$300. Their motivation is supporting and serving the public. They want to help and be recognized. The fire chiefs said that it was a step in the right direction, but this is just classic Conservative speak. The Conservatives say that they are in favour of volunteer firefighters and will support them, they sing their praises, but then they give them \$300. Wonderful. What big spenders. What a great recovery plan. The government did not look into whether these people have the equipment, training and support they need. It says, "hurray for volunteer firefighters", and then expects them to fend for themselves. It expects the municipalities that do not have the means to operate a permanent firefighting service to just keep going. Municipal services that do not have the necessary equipment will not get any. Yet more empty rhetoric from the Conservatives. Behind this paper there is no coherent policy.

We could also talk about children's access to culture. A \$500 tax credit is attractive, but, once again, it is not a refundable tax credit. The second important point is that the culture deficit is greatest among people who have the most financial problems. Unfortunately, as long as we do not address that deficit, those who need it most will not be able to access this tax credit. This is nothing new with the Conservative Party. It makes a big speech to say that it supports culture, but the people who need it still do not have access to it. This is the proof that the Conservative Party is all talk when it comes to Bill C-13.

We could talk about what this bill is missing. Canada is in an economic slump and that is not addressed. All of the economic stakeholders have mentioned that. We have \$500 billion tied up and only 200,000 jobs have been created since the economic recession.

• (1120)

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. It is often somewhat hard for people to really understand what refundable and non-refundable tax credits are, because they do not necessarily complete their own tax returns. As a result, they do not really understand the difference. I wonder if my colleague could explain the difference, perhaps with an example. Say, for example, I earn \$25,000 a year and I want to enrol my daughter in a dance class in January that costs \$250 and I do not have the money to pay for it now. Is there anything in the budget that would allow me to enrol my daughter in the dance class now?

Mr. Alain Giguère: Madam Speaker, that is an excellent question. This gives me a chance to explain the difference between a refundable and a non-refundable tax credit. People who file their tax returns often owe the government money. They have to pay taxes to the government and the tax credit reduces the amount they have to pay.

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Instead of paying \$2,000 in taxes, you would pay \$1,500 and you would get back \$500 for the \$500 you spent on your daughter's dance class. There it is.

Let us suppose that the tax credit is refundable. You enrol your daughter in the dance class right away and, even if you do not pay any taxes, you receive a cheque for \$500 for the expense. That is the main advantage of a refundable tax credit: you are reimbursed for the expense right away.

However, at present, you would have to wait until you file your tax return to receive the refund, and you can only hope that you have to pay enough taxes to get the refund.

[English]

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am at a loss in trying to follow the philosophy of the NDP. Yesterday in question period I heard one of the members on the front bench of the NDP ask about what they called a deficit that was too big. We actually agree with that, which is why we are taking measures to make sure we bring our books into balance. Today, in speaking about the budget a member said at every line item that it was not enough.

On the weekend, I spoke with firefighters who are very happy to get a tax credit which they have never had before. Parents have talked to me about a tax credit for the arts which they have never had before. Yet, the NDP members say it is not enough. However, when it comes to the needs of their own political party, those members say they want to keep the nest egg that they already have which is costing taxpayers \$30 million. They do not want to reduce that.

I am trying to figure out the philosophy of the NDP. Are those members just out for themselves, or do they want Canadians to benefit from a thriving economy?

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Giguère: Madam Speaker, that is a good question and I have a very simple answer. The NDP cares about the finances of Canadians, not the finances of people who do not pay any taxes despite the fact that they have \$500 billion in liquid assets in their bank accounts. That is an important factor. We are talking about the economy. We want a major action plan to revitalize employment. There are 1.7 million unemployed and underemployed workers. These are people who could pay taxes and help us.

Some 350,000 jobs have been lost in the industrial sector and the government acts as if it is no big deal. I am sorry, but we are going to fight for the people. We do not want any more charades. We want more than just a speech about supporting volunteer firefighters because, when we really look at what this tax credit gives them, it is actually nothing.

You are merely giving a speech. There must be an action plan, funding, structure and a goal to back up that speech. There is nothing but an election speech that sings your own praises and says that the government supports volunteer firefighters. The government must not only say these things, it must do them. That is the difference.

Government Orders

● (1125)

[English]

Ms. Eve Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to discuss Bill C-13, An Act to implement certain provisions of the 2011 budget as updated on June 6, 2011 and other measures, better known as the keeping Canada's economy and jobs growing act.

Canada has come out of the global economic downturn with the strongest growth record in the G7. Our government has created nearly 600,000 net new jobs since July 2009.

Our government is standing up for Canadians and fulfilling the strong mandate they gave us to focus on the economy and to create jobs. That is certainly what I heard at the door. Everyone wanted us to focus on the economy and create jobs for our communities and our neighbours.

One such job creation measure present in the next phase of Canada's economic action plan is the hiring credit for small businesses. This one-time credit of up to \$1,000 is aimed at encouraging hiring by Canadian small and medium-sized businesses. It is a wonderful measure to help stimulate the Canadian economy and it is mutually beneficial to both our strong small business sector as well as hard-working Canadians who are seeking a job.

Do not just take my word for it, let us hear from Dan Kelly, senior vice-president of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. This is what he had to say about the small business tax credit. "Since the 2011 budget announcement, many members have called about the credit and reported it will make it easier for them to hire". I think that is what everybody across the country wants. He went on to stress that this was a particularly important initiative as the government had declared 2011 as the year of the entrepreneur.

It is not just the CFIB that is pleased with our hiring credit. It is also the Toronto Board of Trade, which had this to say:

[We] welcomed new initiatives to spur small-business productivity and hiring, such as the Hiring Credit for Small Business.

SMEs are the engines of job growth...Spurring productivity and employment growth among SMEs, as this Budget does, should help Canada's economic recovery.

The hiring credit for small business is getting high praise from such respected institutions as the Canadian Federation of Independent Business and from the Toronto Board of Trade. It is no surprise to me since I have been getting excellent feedback from small businesses in my community of Mississauga—Brampton South.

I am honoured to be speaking today on the great initiatives for small business and job creation that will be implemented as part of the keeping Canada's economy and jobs growing act.

I also want to highlight that the next phase of Canada's economic action plan has a strong focus on helping Canadian families as well.

As a mom to a wonderful six-year-old boy named Jeffrey, there is nothing that is more important to me than my family. I am proud to be a part of a government that stands up for hard-working Canadian families, like those that are the bedrock of my community in Mississauga—Brampton South.

Any mom who has ever signed up their child for music, sport or dance lessons knows how quickly those fees add up. That is why our government already has provided for the very popular fitness tax credit for children that has helped with the cost of sports and has helped to keep our kids fit. I am proud to stand and vote in favour of a budget that will provide tax relief for moms and dads who would like to sign their children up for music or art lessons.

One way our government is standing for families is through the new children's arts tax credit for programs associated with children's artistic, cultural, recreational and development activities, as I have just mentioned. This would allow Canadian families to claim a 15% non-refundable tax credit on up to \$500 in fees for eligible programs. The tax credit would not only help both our children, who would benefit from some of the best programming available, but it would also help encourage Canadians from a very young age to make the best use of the world-class artistic community available to all Canadians.

Another measure introduced as part of budget 2011, aimed at helping Canadian families, is the new family caregiver tax credit. This 15% non-refundable tax credit, on an amount of \$2,000 for caregivers of all types of infirm, dependent relatives, including for the first time spouses, common-law partners and minor children, would help Canadian families receive all of the support they may require. This initiative has been welcomed as a huge step by important groups like the Canadian Caregiver Coalition that has the following comments:

● (1130)

the Canadian Caregiver Coalition...applauds the Federal Budget. The measures announced in the budget are an important acknowledgement of the vital role of family caregivers. The announcement of a Family Caregiver Tax Credit demonstrates the federal government's commitment to families and the caregiving responsibilities that they assume.

Financial support for those who must take time off work is a critical component of effective policy for family caregivers...We are pleased to see the federal government recognizing and furthering the support for family caregivers by mitigating their financial burden through this program.

The final initiative from the next phase of Canada's economic action plan that I would like to speak about today is legislating a permanent annual investment of \$2 billion in the gas tax fund.

I have already had the pleasure to speak about how implementing the bill would help our small businesses, our children, our families, but all of these things need a strong community in order to thrive and reach their full potential.

Our government has made, and will continue to make, significant commitments to cities and communities through the gas tax fund. In fact, we recently tabled legislation to make the gas tax fund permanent, at \$2 billion per year, so municipalities would now be able to count on this stable funding for their infrastructure needs well into the future.

Our government also recognizes the need for future infrastructure support beyond 2014. That is why budget 2011 included a commitment that our government would work with provinces, territories, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and other stakeholders to develop a long-term plan for public infrastructure that extended well beyond the expiry of the building Canada plan.

I am very proud of the unprecedented investments in public infrastructure that our Conservative government has made since taking office in 2006. We will continue to build on this momentum by working with provinces, territories and municipalities to address Canada's infrastructure priorities and challenges.

As a former city councillor, the gas tax investment that was provided by this federal government to municipalities across the country provided for massive investment in transit. For instance, in Mississauga the gas tax funding allowed for us to have our largest expansion in Mississauga transit history. That meant more routes, more buses, more often. It also allowed for us to have the first wheelchair accessible buses throughout our community.

I have risen in the House today and spoken about how the keeping Canada's economy and jobs growing act will help our economy, our families and our communities. I would like to thank all members who have taken the time to listen today and hope they will join with me and support this vital legislation and help to implement the key elements of the next phase of Canada's economic action plan. I would implore the opposition parties to support our budget and help all Canadians.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have a daughter named Pera who is seven years old, like the member across who has a boy similar in age. Our salaries are quite large and therefore enrolling our children in activities is not a problem for us, although lacking the time might be.

What would the member say to a single mother who is earning perhaps \$20,000 a year who cannot afford to enrol her child in these activities? How would this bill help that mother enrol her child in activities?

Ms. Eve Adams: Madam Speaker, there are many hard-working families across our communities. I can certainly speak to Mississauga—Brampton South. I am sure the good people in Vaudreuil-Soulanges would also concur that when they start signing their children up for hockey or music lessons, whether they have one, two or three kids, it does add up terribly quickly. Hockey is about \$1,000 for children. Those parents can now avail themselves of this tax credit. This is an important step.

I would be very surprised if the member opposite voted against this type of support for families in his riding. I certainly would be embarrassed to vote against something like this.

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I am proud to stand in support of this budget. I am proud to stand in support of Canadian families. It is our duty to help all Canadian families.

● (1135)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Madam Speaker, with regard to registering youth in organized sport, I will share some statistics with my colleague across the way, and I know the government has an aversion to actual facts and statistics. However, if we look at participation rates in our country over the last 12 years, there was absolutely no discernible increase in participation rates after the tax credit came forward for registering our sons and daughters in sport programs. After 2008-09, the increases were pretty much the same. The one year in the last 12 years that we had an increase in participation rates was in 2003 and that was because our men and women's hockey teams won gold medals at Salt Lake City. The increase in female participation in sport spiked because of that.

We on the opposition benches are trying to say that if we look at targeted investments in our athletes, our facilities, coaching and create some heroes and role models for young people, then we would get increased participation numbers and more people involved.

When I sat down with my wife and we decided to put our boys in hockey, we did not say that we would do this but there was no tax credit, so to heck with it. It does not enter into the whole thought process, but targeted investments work and that is where the government misses when it comes to encouraging more youth to get involved in sport.

Ms. Eve Adams: Madam Speaker, while I certainly concur that role models are important, our government has made unprecedented investments in sports across the country. Two weeks ago I was at the Skate Canada event in Mississauga and announced some funding for it and provided gold medals. It was the first time a gold medal had been won by a Canadian. Up until now it had always been won by Russians or others. The gold and the silver medals went to Canadians and then the bronze went to the Italians. I am all in favour of wonderful sports.

The member is correct when he says that Canadian families will enrol their children in sports or fitness classes or arts classes. Every mom and dad will sacrifice to ensure that their children can avail themselves of music or hockey lessons. What the budget does is recognize the high cost for families. We believe in providing more money into the pockets of hard-working moms and dads. It is simple. I would hope the Liberal and NDP opposition members would want to join us in helping young moms and dads.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Madam Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-13, the second budget implementation act for the budget 2011.

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While I agree that some of the topics covered in Bill C-13 are also subjects that we on this side of the House feel are important, I feel that this bill misses the mark widely and would not deliver what Canadians need, and I think my colleagues would agree. The topics are important but the content is weak.

While the government has entitled the bill, “keeping Canada’s economy and jobs growing act”, I feel, and we feel on this side of the House, that it would do little to grow jobs or the economy and suffice it to say that I support the title but, unfortunately, not the content.

While I will return to the specifics of the bill in a moment, I feel that it is important to discuss the context in which the bill has been tabled and to talk about what I see as a few very alarming trends, both with our own economy and internationally.

As both sides of this House will recognize, the world economy has become increasingly unpredictable and, due to the now globalized trading network, it is very hard for governments to insulate themselves from shocks, such as we are seeing in Greece, Italy and other European countries.

The mood of this uncertainty is often reflected in the moods shown by members opposite during these unpredictable times. On one day we see the members of the government thumping their desks and on the next day they almost seem to be in a panic about current events. The global waves seem to washing over on the government. One day it is boasting and the next day it is not sure what to do and it is wringing its hands.

What is most perplexing to me is that, while the government often wants the public to believe we are helpless in the face of these global forces, we hear over and over again that while there is really nothing we can do, these are economic shocks coming from elsewhere that we have no control over and, in the same breath, the government has single-handedly created hundreds of thousands of jobs within the economy. I think this is very inconsistent and it is something that the government has to remedy.

The government cannot have it both ways. It cannot say on the one hand that it absolves itself from any responsibility for our current economic woes while, at the same time, taking the entire credit saying that the government itself creates these jobs, when it is clearly not true.

To be fair, this practice of double standards is a very bad habit, which most governments undertake, but, it is much better to be honest with Canadians and to really own up to what is going on within our economy and internationally. The government needs to tell Canadians the truth about what lies ahead for Canada and how the government plans to help Canadians maximize their potential in these uncertain economic times.

The government, for example, made a good start, or a small start, when the finance minister warned Canadians about reducing their personal debt loads. This is something that I think was honest and from the heart. It was not rhetoric. It was a genuine concern that I think we all share in this House, that Canadians are massively over-leveraged with their own budgets and they need to do something to reduce them. The government made a good start when it admitted this and it tried to warn Canadians about what is coming and what needs to happen in the future.

However, after that slight warning, the government seemed to go back to the rhetoric and now all we hear is that the world economy is in flux and that there is nothing the government can do about it. However, when there is any kind of report of job creation, the government takes credit for it.

The government needs to be honest, stick with being honest with Canadians and acknowledge the extent to which the global economy is shifting. European and North American economic dominance is being replaced with an Asian dominance. This is a trend that all Canadians see and it is something that the government needs to recognize and adapt to.

If we just look at GDP growth rates, that is what says it all. World Bank data shows that Canada’s GDP growth rate was around 3% in 2010, where China’s was around 10%. In 2009, we actually had a negative GDP growth rate of -2.5%, where China’s economy continued to grow at a rate of 9%. While we went through a huge shock in 2008, China’s growth was business as usual.

As one of my colleagues at Simon Fraser University, noted economist, John Richards, once said to me, “We’ve had our run. Now it’s Asia’s turn to dominate”. This is something that we need to recognize in this House and adapt to it.

It does look like times will increasingly get tough. The IMF has slashed our growth projections to 2.1% this year and just 1.7% next year. We can compare that again with China, which will be at a projected rate of about 9% or 10%. We can see that this is not a one-time, one-off event. This is a consistent happening where the GDP growth rate in Canada is shrinking while China’s is growing.

• (1140)

We need to be honest with Canadians about where we are headed and what we can do to weather these economic times.

Bill C-13 and other measures taken by the government indicate to me that the government does not have much of a plan for the Canadian economy. It seems the government is content to encourage massive foreign investment in our resource industry, ram pipelines through to ship unconventional crude from the Alberta oil sands to Asian markets, roll back regulation in the north and mine it for all its worth, and then continue to ship unrefined products to foreign markets.

The problem is, that is yesterday’s approach to managing the Canadian economy and it really lacks vision. The government needs to stop relying on yesterday’s flawed solutions to Canada’s economic problems or Canada will be swamped by the global economy. It needs to recognize where we stand in relation to the rest of the world and plan accordingly.

Now that the major portion of this so-called budget bill centres on removing a relatively small amount of money from political parties does not show me that the government is serious about the major challenges that lie ahead for Canada, but rather that it is immersed in petty politics. This shines through in the rhetoric that we cannot do anything, that it is an international crisis and yet the government still takes credit for any kind of job creation in Canada.

Bill C-13 should include a vision for Canada that does not rely on hoping foreign companies and governments will pillage our natural resources, ship them to their shores, add value and then ship them back to us. This is yesterday's way of running the Canadian economy and we do not need that any more. In fact, we will not grow or flourish if we continue with this approach.

Bill C-13 would instill much more confidence in Canadians if it contained real measures to grow a secondary industry in this country. For example, in recent meetings I have had with petroleum producers in this country, with individual industries and their associations, they have revealed to me that the number of refineries in Canada has dramatically declined from almost 50 to under 20, with others under serious threat of closure. The bill has no plan to maintain this valuable refinery industry. It appears that the Conservatives would be happy to fade it away, and these refineries will fade away. We have seen them closed in Quebec, as has been mentioned here today in the House.

However, to put this in context, the largest refinery in Canada produces 300,000 barrels per day, which was a massive refinery when it was built many decades ago. India has recently built a complex that refines 1.2 million barrels per day. That number is sometimes hard to get one's head around but that is a massive refinery and more of these are on the horizon both in China and India.

We need to take stock of where we stand, not just in this industry but in other industries as well, in relation to our secondary production. We need to come up with a real plan to save these industries and ensure we think about how to grow them, if we can. We need a closely targeted investment to help these industries survive and thrive. Other countries have done it and we need to follow their lead. To simply throw up one's hands and say that the market will do this or that foreign investment will come in and save us is not the way forward.

The challenge for the government is to be honest with Canadians and provide an economic vision for the country that does more than rely on shipping raw resources to foreign countries. The bill does nothing to reassure me that the government has such a vision and I doubt that it does much to convince Canadians of this either.

It is worth reviewing a few facts and figures in my remaining minute or so to show where we stand.

Official unemployment in the country shows 1.4 million people out of work. However, if we include all of those who are discouraged and unemployed, it pushes that number to two million unemployed. This number may be structural. I have asked the government in the House to reveal what it thinks the natural rate of unemployment is. The U.S. tells us every month what its natural rate of unemployment is. The Conservative government will not do this. In fact, sometimes

I wonder if it even knows what that statistic means. Is their plan to maintain our unemployment rate at 7% or to move forward and try to reduce that rate?

We need a vision but we do not have one.

• (1145)

[Translation]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Madam Speaker, this fall, my colleague from Jonquière—Alma and I went to the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean area to meet with seniors' groups. They shared many of their concerns with us and told us what issues they want us to fight for in the House of Commons, in Ottawa.

One concern is the protection of their pension funds, which are threatened whenever a company declares bankruptcy. I was disappointed to see that the Conservatives refused to include in their bill the suggestion—from seniors across Canada—that workers' funds should take precedence because these people have spent their whole lives investing in the company's pension fund and they want to be able to count on their pension.

What does my NDP colleague think about the fact that this bill does not really respond to what seniors want when it comes to protecting their pension funds?

• (1150)

[English]

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: Madam Speaker, that is a reflection of what is lacking in the bill. It is filled with petty or small measures, some targeted at scoring points against the opposition. It contains no answers for Canadians. These are not just numbers on a sheet. These are real people who are facing uncertain times. It is especially tough for seniors who have planned for their retirement but who see it under threat because of the government's push for them to rely on markets for their pension rather than protecting or strengthening our good Canadian pension plan system.

We on this side of the House are disappointed with the measures in the bill and urge the government to do more.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Madam Speaker, speaking of small measures, I would like to ask my colleague how it can be that they want to encourage small business and rural economies, yet there are no measures to encourage environmental projects. There is no investment in the environment, which is everyone's future. There are no measures to stimulate projects in research and development or in practical projects on the ground. There are no development measures. Those types of projects could create a lot of jobs and many ideas come from people in the regions. But there are no measures to stimulate growth in the environmental sector.

Government Orders

[English]

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: Madam Speaker, I was talking about refineries. The vision of the NDP is for a green and sustainable future, which is where we need to be. It seems like the government has missed the boat on that. It has abandoned these types of investments.

For example, China and the U.S. are leading the way on solar and wind power investments. We seem to have thrown that away. We did have an opportunity. We were in it early. In the 1970s we were investing in solar power. The government decided not to continue and to leave it to other markets. It just extracts and sends out raw resources hoping that will be enough to keep our economy going. I do not think that is much of a plan and I do not think Canadians will find that much of a vision either. I much prefer the vision that my colleague outlined.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Madam Speaker, mentioning the government's lack of vision is very apt.

Currently, we are trying to get increased funding for public transit projects. We are trying to make the economic argument that they help innovation and productivity. These projects would make the economy run smoothly. Sometimes it feels like we are running up against a brick wall because of the government's lack of vision. It does not see the economic benefits of these elements that we in the official opposition have been proposing.

Could the hon. member speak more to innovation and improvements with respect to Canada's economic productivity?

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: Madam Speaker, what officials in Nordic countries have been doing is investing in clusters. They find areas of the country where private sector businesses are already thriving, whether it is with regard to sustainable resources or other types of industries, and then they help those industries grow. They do not create an industry from scratch. They invest in what is already there.

That is the kind of initiative we need to consider in the House, which we do not see coming from that side, and that is disappointing.

Mr. Lawrence Toet (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to rise in the House to speak on this matter that is most important to Canadians, Bill C-13, the Canadian economic action plan.

First, I would like to express my gratitude and humble honour to the constituents of Elmwood—Transcona for placing their trust in me to represent them here in Ottawa. It is a job that I take most seriously. It is also why I am very happy to speak to this next phase of Canada's economic action plan, something that I heard so much positive feedback about while speaking with my constituents in Elmwood—Transcona.

Canada can be proud that under the leadership of the Prime Minister and the Conservative government we have accomplished seven straight quarters of economic growth. In a time where in so many places across the globe people are suffering because of the weakness of their economy, here in Canada we can take pride and confidence in the fact that we are seeing movement in the right direction.

Canada is in one of the strongest fiscal positions of the world's top performing advanced economies. This is not an accident. With our continued focus on the strength of our economy, we can ensure that we will continue to see strong economic growth. In a time where so many places in the developed world are seeing serious job losses, we can be proud of the fact that since July 2009 Canada has created almost 600,000 net new jobs and over 80% of these being full-time.

With the Conservative government's continued focus on the Canadian economy and the things that are important to all Canadians, this next phase of the Canadian economic action plan offers a solid amount of strong initiatives that will aid all Canadians. With a focus on the people and groups of citizens that are important to Canadian society, such as families, seniors, small businesses, job creators, volunteer firefighters, manufacturers, students, farmers, and so many more, we can acknowledge that the primary concern of the government is to strengthen the ability of all Canadians. With initiatives that will keep taxes low and keep us on track to balance the budget, Canadians can be confident that we will continue to be a leading force in global economic recovery.

Families are integral to the strength of Canadian society, so it is important that as part of our economic strategy we offer programs and initiatives to help the families of Canada. In my riding of Elmwood—Transcona, I have spoken with many families, asking them for their thoughts on what is important to them. Many were able to remind me of their excitement regarding the tax credits promised during the federal election.

Today, I can proudly say that the Conservative government is ready to deliver on that front. With a new children's tax credit of a 15% non-refundable tax credit on up to \$500 in eligible fees for programs associated with children's artistic, cultural, recreational, and developmental activities, the government is taking Canadian families seriously. We understand that it is important for children to be involved in positive activities. We also recognize that we can aid families in having their children participate in these types of activities with a tax credit that will help families keep more of their hard-earned money in their own pockets.

Often families have shared their concerns with the limit that was placed on claimable medical expenses of a dependent relative. With the next phase of the Canadian economic action plan, our government will be removing the \$10,000 limit for these eligible medical expenses.

I am happy to share with members and all Canadians the facts regarding the new family caregiver tax credit. This is a 15% non-refundable tax credit on the amount of \$2,000 for caregivers of all types of dependent relatives, including, for the first time, spouses, common law partners, and minor children. Along with the other incentives offered for families, I can attest that the concerns of families in Canada are recognized.

We take to heart the concerns that have been brought forward by Canadian families. It is due to our strong record of tax relief that the total tax saving for a typical family in Canada is over \$3,000. That is taking to heart the concerns of Canadian families. That is a testament to this government's strong commitment to deliver on the promises it made to Canadians to keep more of their hard-earned money in their pockets.

Along with families, we recognize the growing needs of our seniors. Our Conservative government understands that Canada's seniors helped build and make our country great. That is why it is important to us to enhance the guaranteed income supplement, enhance the new horizons program for seniors, eliminate the mandatory retirement age for federally regulated employees, and extend the targeted initiative for older workers by \$50 million.

• (1155)

By enhancing the GIS, where eligible low income seniors will receive additional benefits of up to \$600 for single seniors and \$840 for couples, we will be helping more than 680,000 seniors across our great country.

One elderly gentleman has stopped by my office multiple times, occasionally for other issues, but each time he comes in he is sure to tell me about how this increase to the annual GIS will make the difference for him and his wife between living very tight and being relieved of their financial concerns.

I am happy to speak today to our government delivering what is more than deserved by our Canadian seniors and to say to all the seniors in my riding of Elmwood—Transcona that another election promise is being delivered.

In my riding of Elmwood—Transcona I have had the pleasure of conversing with many of our small businesses. These men and women are happy to hear and see the incentives offered by the government to help them offer employment, start up their businesses, and run successfully in the Canadian marketplace.

With the new hiring credit for small business, a temporary one-time credit of up to \$1,000 against a small firm's increased employment insurance premiums, this credit helps up to 525,000 employers defray the cost of additional hiring.

The Conservative government is excited to offer support also to youth entrepreneurs with \$20 million to support the Canadian Youth Business Foundation's activities. This program has helped young entrepreneurs become the business leaders of tomorrow, through mentorship, learning resources and start up financing.

We have increased the small business limit to \$500,000, referring to the amount of income earned by a small business eligible for the reduced federal tax rate. We have reduced the small business tax rate from 12% to 11%, along with other incentives on which I do not have time to go into details.

These incentives show our government's commitment to helping Canadian small businesses continue to be successful. We recognize the importance of small business to the Canadian economy.

Before I wrap up, there are a few other key parts of this phase of Canada's economic action plan that I would like to touch on.

Government Orders

In the continued efforts of the Conservative government to strengthen the integrity and accountability in government, as well as political activities, I would like to draw attention to the fact that in this stage of the economic action plan, we will continue to take taxpayers' dollars seriously. That is why, in this stage of Canada's economic action plan, we are following through on our government's campaign commitment to phase-out per vote subsidies for political parties.

The government will introduce legislation to gradually reduce the per-year, per-vote subsidy in increments, starting from April 1, 2012 until it is completely eliminated in 2015-16. This will generate savings of up to \$30 million.

Our government has always opposed direct taxpayer subsidies to political parties and believes that political parties should rely primarily on their supporters for financing.

One other area I would like to touch on is the recognition of Canadian charities. We understand the important role that charity plays in Canadian society and we are committed to supporting that. That is why in budget 2006 we eliminated the capital gains tax associated with the donation of publicly listed securities to public charities. That is why budget 2010 reformed the disbursement quota to reduce administrative complexity.

In the next phase of Canada's economic action plan, we will build on our support for charities by cracking down on the few individuals who abuse the charitable system by enhancing transparency and strengthening compliance requirements, and providing the CRA with the necessary tools to deal with the charitable status of organizations where individuals involved have a history of abusing the system.

The Canadian government, with this next phase of the Canadian economic development plan, continues to show it puts all Canadians first. The Conservative government proves in this phase to continue to deliver on the election promises made to concerned Canadians. Our government will not lose focus of what is most important to Canadians, our economy. Rather, we will continue to implement good and transparent use of tax dollars that will be used to enhance our economy and allow us to remain the economic envy of the world.

• (1200)

[Translation]

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in debating Bill C-13, we can talk about how little the Conservative Party is proposing. We can also talk about what the Conservative Party is not doing. We can also talk about the promises the Conservative Party has broken during this Parliament and previous Parliaments. I will focus on only one aspect.

We have to remember the date of May 7, 2007. Hon. members might not remember that date. Although I am new, I certainly remember it. Following a promise in the previous budget to fight tax evasion, the current Minister of Finance made an about-face at the time and said that he was not able to fight tax evasion after all.

Government Orders

Where do the Conservative government's interests lie? Do they lie in defending all Canadians or the interests of Conservative taxpayers?

• (1205)

[*English*]

Mr. Lawrence Toet: Mr. Speaker, as I said in my speech, the citizens of my riding of Elmwood—Transcona have rightly acknowledged that we are doing much for Canadian citizens across the spectrum. My riding has a different spectrum of citizens and they all see the benefits of this budget for them.

They have a desire to see us go ahead with what we have brought forward. We have lived up to our commitments and brought forward what we promised during the election campaign. I am hearing thanks from the citizens in my riding for us going forward with what we committed to.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona a question focusing on the elimination of what is generally referred to as the per-vote subsidy. It has been less than \$28 million per year over time and actually represents a very small portion of the total amount of tax dollars that go to federal political parties.

In an effort to cut federal tax dollars going to political parties, is the government considering cutting tax credits to its donors, which in 2009 came to over \$10 million to the Conservative Party alone, or to electoral expense reimbursements, which in 2009 came to over \$21 million to the Conservative Party alone?

Mr. Lawrence Toet: Mr. Speaker, as I expressed before, we made a commitment to our electorate on the per-vote subsidy and we are continuing down that path. We promised the citizens of Canada that we would eliminate the per-vote subsidy. The feedback I get in my riding is very supportive of us continuing down this path. Constituents want Canadian political parties to stand on their own feet and not rely on subsidies from the federal government.

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his excellent speech today on the second half of the budget bill in terms of ensuring it is law before the end of the year. I appreciate his constituents voting for him and sending him here. He is doing a great job in the House and we appreciate that.

Of the number of items in today's bill, whether it is promotion of job creation through the temporary hiring credit, support for communities through the gas fund, the family caregiver tax credit, is there one or two that the member would like to particularly highlight that are really important to his riding in Winnipeg?

Mr. Lawrence Toet: Mr. Speaker, there are a couple of items I want to highlight that I touched on in my speech. One is the work we are doing to help small businesses with their hiring credits and the extension of \$500,000 to them. They see this as a great help. When I meet with small business owners, they say this is a fantastic opportunity for them to grow and expand their businesses. They want to do it on their own and be contributing members to the growth of the Canadian economy. They see great opportunity in that.

The other issue I touched on in my speech was seniors. They are very thankful for the GIS supplement. They see it as an acknowl-

edgement of what they have done for our country and appreciate that we are recognizing what they have done to build Canada.

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I welcome my colleague from Elmwood—Transcona. His predecessor, Mr. Jim Maloway, was my seatmate at the far end of the House. He was elected again as an MLA in the New Democratic government in Manitoba. I congratulate Mr. Maloway on that. I do miss him as a seatmate, but nonetheless he is back in the Manitoba legislature and we are happy for him.

My colleague from Elmwood—Transcona said something and I had to write it down because I was slightly taken aback. In referring to the Conservative government, he said, "We put all Canadians first". I would challenge my friend from Elmwood—Transcona on that one.

Regarding the tax credits laid out by the Conservatives, for all the things for children which they talked about, one might say it is admirable and that we want young people to get into the arts, sports and different clubs and to find a way to help parents make that happen financially. However, the difficulty is that it is supposed to help all Canadian families according to what my friend said. The reality, of course, is that this is not true. A tax credit cannot help all Canadian families because people who live in poverty do not pay tax. They cannot get the tax credit if they do not pay tax.

How does the government intend to help those families get their children into the arts and sports and join clubs and participate with other children, as this bill purports to do, when those families who can least afford to have their children join in the first place get the proverbial goose egg, nada, nothing, zero, not a penny, no financial help whatsoever? They will not receive one solitary red cent. Why? Because it is a tax credit. Tax credits are for people who have a certain amount of taxable income and remit taxes to the government and they get some form of credit back. It is elementary. Who does that credit really help? It helps people in the top income brackets, the folks who can actually afford to pay for all the things their young children may want to do.

As a parent of kids who are not so young now, when they were young my wife and I wanted them to participate in various activities. We had two well-paying jobs. I worked in the manufacturing sector and my spouse worked in the health care field. We were fortunate to be able to afford to have our three kids in the programs that they wanted to join. We had well-paying, full-time jobs, both of which were unionized. We had good pay, good benefits and good pensions. That is the type of workforce we want to create. That is the type of workforce that could benefit from tax credits, if that is the direction in which the government wants to go. It is not for those that are underemployed or unemployed, or for those who are in dire need, in fact in poverty, who still have children who will not be able to participate.

We have heard numbers being bandied back and forth. We have heard about the 600,000 net new jobs. There is an old saying which I will not repeat here because the language might be unparliamentary. It is about figures and figurers. We will leave aside as to who figures and who is the figurer trying to figure out what the figures are.

The bottom line is the real number. In July 2008 there were 17,084,200 people employed in the labour force in this country. In July 2011, a mere few months ago, there were 17,344,200 people employed in the labour force. I will be the figurer on this one. I think I can do the arithmetic; it does not seem too complicated. That is actually an increase of 260,000 jobs.

I am not sure where the government gets the figure of some 600,000 net new jobs. Net of course is the difference between what one had and what one has now, as most folks would see it. What we have is less than half that amount. If that be the case, who am I to quibble with Statistics Canada? I know the government did when it wanted to get rid of the long form census but that is a debate for another day.

● (1210)

Nonetheless, we can clearly see that the number of jobs purported to be created is significantly lower than what the government purports it to be.

My riding of Welland is a glorious place. I invite my colleagues to visit Welland. It is a wonderful place to be, but it suffers a huge amount of unemployment, because the manufacturing sector that was not supported by the government simply took off. It went to Mexico, Illinois, and Indiana. It packed up and went to China.

We watched Henniges Automotive dry up last month and send 300 workers and their families in Welland to the unemployment line. What is their future under the Conservative government? Less than 40% of Ontarians who are unemployed actually qualify for EI. That is the future for those folks who have been in and out of work over the last year and a half because of the downturn in that sector. The sector did not dry up. Henniges makes rubber mouldings for automobiles. It is headed to the United States. It is going to a state where it will get tax advantages because the government pours money into new firms and expands existing ones.

It is not a question of a business going out of business. It is a question of a company leaving this country and leaving our folks high and dry. We have seen this throughout Welland's history, especially in the last number of years. John Deere did exactly the same thing and the government washed its hands of the situation and said that is the way it goes. That is not good enough and it should not be the way it goes for Canadians.

I would like to pick up on the remarks of my colleague from Burnaby—Douglas. I am a little bit older than he is and when I was in high school, in grade nine, teachers talked about how we had to diversify the economy. At the time we were good at digging stuff out of the ground and cutting logs. We are still good at it today. In fact the mining sector is seen as one of the best in the world, which is a good thing. Except when I was in high school the idea was to take that stuff we dug out of the ground or the raw logs we cut down and do something with them. Manufacturing is what it is called. Manufacturing seems to be an ugly word these days. We seem not to

want to manufacture; we let others do it because they are good at it somewhere else.

Government Orders

We have gone back 40 years. It is 40 years since I have been in high school. We have gone back four decades, back to the same old, same old, when clearly what economists and teachers in my high school and other schools were saying to young people like me as we looked forward to potential jobs, was to diversify the economy, make manufacturing jobs. It would give us an opportunity to work in good-paying full-time jobs with pensions and benefits, unionized jobs if that is the case. The economy would grow and so would our country. Lo and behold, what did we have during the 1970s? Someone who was my age at the time and lived in the heartland of this country, Ontario, could literally walk up the street and get a job the next day after quitting a job the day before.

Today we have young people who are still in school, not necessarily because they want to be there, but because they cannot find a job. They cannot start a career because there are no jobs in which to start careers, because of the limited opportunities over the last five to seven years. Yet the government presents a budget and all of those aspects are absent. All of those pieces that we would want to see and did see in the 1970s when we diversified the economy, when we actually made sure there were businesses where we could get a full-time job with good pay and benefits and pensions. We have eliminated them and now we have temps and people working on contract. We have itinerant workers.

It reminds me of the dirty thirties when men would stand outside the gate and wait for the boss to pick them one at a time and send the rest of them home to come back the next day and try again. That is what we are doing to our young people and it is criminal. We are wasting the potential of young folks who are our future by not making sure that we have the investments set up so they have a sustainable future, good paying full-time jobs with benefits and pensions. That is a crime. That is what is absent in the budget.

● (1215)

I suggest the government put it in the budget to make sure we look after not only those who are at retirement age, but those who are at the beginning stages of their lives, ready to walk into the new economy, so that they can participate in that new economy.

● (1220)

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think what we are seeing here is the inability of the government to make the transition from being a minority government to a majority government, in the sense that it does not have a long-term vision for the future. It is still going on with flashy little things here and there, trying to pull the wool over the eyes of Canadians with its programs, saying that it is taking care of Canadians' tax dollars.

Government Orders

With respect to the infrastructure program, making the gas tax permanent is great. However, the federal government takes 10¢ out of the pockets of the people when they pay for gas and gives them 5¢ back. What happens to the other 5¢? Why is that 5¢ not going to our municipalities which are currently so burdened?

The way the program is run is more about taking credit for doing things than actually taking concrete action on the ground. The bill does not have anything substantial to build the future we need to build.

Could my hon. colleague speak to that point?

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Mr. Speaker, it is absolutely true. As someone who spent five years as a municipal councillor, I know exactly what the member is talking about when it comes to the gas tax. I was on council the first time the gas tax money came down. Yes, it was decent money, but even in small communities it was not meeting the infrastructure needs. What greater way to invest in our infrastructure than to continue to do it now.

Let me quote Sherry Cooper. I do not think Sherry Cooper is a New Democrat. I will have to check with our party to make sure that she does not hold a card, but there is a leadership race on, and maybe she signed up for one. Sherry Cooper said:

The misplaced belief that the road to economic prosperity is paved by near-term fiscal tightening, as espoused by our own Prime Minister Stephen Harper and British Prime Minister David Cameron last week, shows we have learned nothing from Herbert Hoover's response to the Great Depression.

If we invest in communities today, we will do two things. We will set communities up on a future path for prosperity, and we will put people who are not working back to work. What a grand notion that would be. We would increase employment levels and make our communities a better place through infrastructure. The bridges and tunnels in Montreal would be safe. Going into the future, communities could build on that prosperity and help young folks get a job.

What an amazing and novel idea that would be. Maybe the government should take that up.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Just a reminder to hon. members that the use of other hon. members' names, even if it is in the context of a quotation, is not permitted. It is something to keep an eye on.

Questions and comments.

[Translation]

The hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord.

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conference Board of Canada indicated to us a few weeks ago that the gap between the rich and members of the middle class is growing rapidly in this country.

In studying this bill, I see many tax benefits for the rich and even for the upper middle class, but I see very little for the poor or the lower middle class. I would like my NDP colleague's opinion on the value of this bill for Canadians.

The NDP is known as the party that stands up for families and workers and I see very little for them. I would like my NDP

colleague to confirm whether he is seeing what I am seeing, or not seeing, in this bill.

[English]

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is absolutely right. There is nothing in this bill that addresses that issue.

That income gap is growing. By all measures every major economist not only in this country but worldwide has said the same thing. When Warren Buffett says that the gap is way too large and it is time for rich folks to pay some more, that is an indicator that the rich folks have too much. When a rich person says he has too much, people should believe him.

It is now time for those who have more to look at those who have less, not through charity, not by handing out charitable vouchers to folks, but by making sure that they get a fair piece of the economy, making sure that they get what they are entitled to through their hard work. Of course, they must go back to work first. That is the piece that must happen.

That is why we look to the government and ask: Where is the jobs plan? Why is the government not creating jobs for our folks, the young and the not so young? In my riding the vast majority of folks who are unemployed look like me. They are my age. They had jobs at one point in time, but now they do not, because of the trade agreements the government and the previous government put together that let all those jobs disappear.

My region, Welland, used to be the fourth highest paying region in the country, but it is not any more.

• (1225)

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak once again in favour of budget 2011, or Bill C-13.

Our government has been working hard to keep our promises. We are continuing to focus on the economy, which is our top priority.

The current fragile stage of the global economy is apparent in the current situation facing Greece, Italy and our neighbours to the south. Canada's economy will no doubt feel the effect of what is happening in Europe and the United States; our government realizes that Canada's economic recovery is still fragile, and we are focused on creating jobs and economic growth for Canadians.

Budget 2011 includes many important initiatives designed to help strengthen our economy and provides support for our communities, our families, our farmers, our businesses and our small towns and rural communities.

The next phase of Canada's economic action plan will invest in the key drivers of economic growth: innovation, investment, education and training.

Canada's economic performance during the recovery stands out among advanced countries, showing seven straight quarters of economic growth. Nearly 540,000 net new jobs have been created since July 2009, with over 80% of them being full-time positions. Job creation and economic growth are important to the residents of Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound and certainly to all Canadians.

Government Orders

Our economic action plan is working. Our government's investments have been effective in shielding hard-working Canadians from the worst of our global recession, and we are committed to continuing our efforts to foster long-term growth and job creation.

Today I would like to highlight a number of initiatives included in budget 2011 that would benefit my riding and many communities across Canada.

The first is Canada's retirement income system. Our government understands the importance of a secure and dignified retirement for Canadians who have spent their lives contributing to our society. We continue to be committed to improving the financial literacy of Canadians, particularly by helping those who are saving for retirement to make informed decisions. Budget 2011 proposes to provide \$3 million per year to undertake financial literacy initiatives.

Another initiative is the children's art tax credit. Since 2007, Canadians with children have been able to take advantage of the children's fitness tax credit, which promotes physical activity among children and recognizes the costs associated with extracurricular sports such as hockey, soccer and swimming.

As can be the case with participation in fitness activities, a child's participation in artistic, cultural, recreational and developmental activities can be difficult for parents to afford. Budget 2011 introduces a 15% non-refundable tax credit that would be available for a wide range of activities that contribute to a child's development and that are currently not available under the children's fitness tax credit. This credit will be provided on up to \$500 of eligible fees per child. The introduction of this tax credit would promote the participation of young children in my riding and across Canada in extracurricular activities and would ease the financial burden on their parents.

With respect to seniors, budget 2011 would invest more than \$300 million per year to enhance the GIS, or guaranteed income supplement, for seniors. This measure would provide a new top-up benefit of up to \$600 for single seniors and \$840 for couples. This benefit would improve the financial security of seniors in my riding and of more than 680,000 seniors across Canada.

We also have the family caregiver tax credit. Our government recognizes the personal sacrifice that many Canadians make to care for their family members with serious illnesses such as MS or ALS, just to mention a couple. We are proposing a family caregiver tax credit that would provide a 15% non-refundable credit on an amount of \$2,000. This credit would help many families in my riding and an estimated 500,000 caregivers across Canada.

I have a sister who suffers from MS and I understand the toll that this disease and many other diseases can have on the victim and certainly on families. This tax credit can help ease the financial burden of individuals who provide care for family members who are combatting serious illnesses.

There is also the enhanced medical expense tax credit. Our government is also committed to helping ease the financial burden on Canadians who care for a dependent relative with extraordinary medical and disability-related expenses. Budget 2011 removes the \$10,000 limit on the amount of eligible medical expenses that can be claimed on behalf of a financially dependent family member. This

measure will apply for 2011 and subsequent tax years. This initiative is welcome news to the many constituents in my riding who care for a very ill or disabled family member.

• (1230)

Next is palliative and end-of-life care.

For Canadians living with life-threatening illnesses, no matter how old they are, appropriate palliative and end-of-life care helps maximize their quality of life and ensures respect for the patients and their families as they approach death. This government continues to support various programs and initiatives related to palliative and end-of-life care. This budget would provide one-time funding of \$3 million to support the development of new community-integrated palliative care models.

Another very welcome and appreciated item in this budget is the volunteer firefighter tax credit.

My riding of Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, with the exception of the City of Owen Sound, relies solely on the services of volunteer firefighters. Our government is proud of the nearly 85,000 volunteer firefighters who keep our communities safe across this country.

In recognition of their brave service, the budget introduced a 15% non-refundable volunteer firefighter tax credit on an amount of \$3,000 for volunteer firefighters who perform at least 200 hours of service in their community each year.

Agriculture is the number one industry my riding. It is an important part of Canada's economy and is, as I said, the biggest industry in my riding. One of our government's priorities is to continue to promote long-term profitability and global competitiveness of Canadian farmers and agribusinesses. We have announced a two-year, \$50 million agriculture innovation initiative to help Canada's farmers remain on the cutting edge of agriculture innovations. This is an investment we must make.

In early 2011 the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food had the opportunity to travel across Canada during our biotechnology study. One key theme that was top of mind with producers and industry stakeholders was the importance of research to the competitiveness and profitability of Canadian farmers and agribusinesses.

Another important initiative to our government is strengthening food safety. Food safety from field to fork is fundamental to the health and wellness of all Canadians. In the 2011 budget, our government has taken steps to improve Canada's food safety system by providing an additional \$100 million over five years, on a cash basis, to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency to enhance our food inspection capacity.

Without a doubt, investing in research and innovation and food safety initiatives would strengthen the foundation of Canada's agricultural sector and improve the ability of Canadian farmers and agribusinesses to compete in the domestic and global marketplace.

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Another initiative is enhancing environmental protection of the Great Lakes. This measure is near and dear to my heart, as my riding is bordered on three sides by Georgian Bay and Lake Huron.

Protecting the water quality and the health of the Great Lakes is vital to ensuring that Canadians can depend on this rich ecosystem for drinking water, for recreation and for jobs. The Great Lakes are an important resource to the residents of my riding and to many other Canadians.

Building on the existing Great Lakes action plan and action plan for clean water, budget 2011 announces an additional \$5 million over two years to improve near-shore water and ecosystem health and to better address the presence of phosphorus in the Great Lakes.

I have to mention that early in the new year, I intend to table a bill that would ban the sale or diversion of our fresh water in this country. It is something that is, as I said, near and dear to my heart.

In closing, I will mention that local small businesses are going to benefit. Our government recognizes that they are job creators and help to stimulate our economy, making them a crucial part of economic recovery. For these reasons, we have created the new hiring credit for small business, which would provide a temporary one-time credit of up to \$1,000 against any potential increases in 2011 EI premiums over 2010. This new credit would help over 525,000 employers to pay the cost of additional hiring.

Mr. Speaker, I know I am running out time. I look forward to answering any questions.

• (1235)

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will focus in particular on the tax credit for family caregivers. I have been a nurse and I am familiar with the family caregiver situation. When they become caregivers, people often have no choice but to cut down on their hours of work. As a result, they do not earn enough money to benefit from this tax credit. Of the households with a caregiver, 65% declare a combined income of less than \$45,000 and 23% declare an income of less than \$20,000. The majority of family caregivers cannot even take advantage of these tax credits. During the holidays, I will work shifts as a nurse at my hospital. I would like to know what to tell the families of patients and the patients who, unfortunately, will become sick in January 2012. They must wait until March or April 2013 before, maybe, getting a tax credit after they file their taxes. What can I tell these patients who ask me what they can do to survive in the meantime?

[English]

Mr. Larry Miller: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague across the floor for her great question, welcome her to the House of Commons and congratulate her. The profession of nursing is a very elegant career and it is not something everybody can do. I appreciate her work in that profession.

I am glad to hear that she supports our caregiver tax credit. As we know, there was never anything in place. I give our government a lot of credit for establishing it. Enough is never enough, but, as she pointed out, this is a well-deserved plan in our budget, and maybe in the future we can build on it. However, it is a great start, and I have had a lot of positive feedback about it.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the most egregious things in this bill and budget is that tax credits are not refundable. It means that people who can already afford these activities would get an additional gift from the government, but those who cannot afford them would get no help at all, whether it is children in sports or arts or whatever the case may be.

I would like to ask the member this question: in his community, are there any people volunteering to fight fires who are between jobs, whose jobs have been phased out or who do not have a taxable level of earnings? Are any people like that volunteering to fight fires, and do they not also deserve a small part of taxpayer-funded credits for their work in the community?

Mr. Larry Miller: Mr. Speaker, I do not have the exact answer as to whether people who are between jobs are currently volunteer firefighters, but I think that point is irrelevant. Whether volunteers are between jobs or are working full time while being volunteer firefighters, they will qualify for the firefighter tax credit. I take it the member supports this measure; I know I have had positive feedback in my riding on it.

Mr. John Carmichael (Don Valley West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this being the year of the entrepreneur and a week to celebrate entrepreneurship, I wonder if the hon. member could speak a little more about the hiring tax credit. Coming from a business background, I understand clearly that incentives help to create greater impetus and stimulation in business. Specifically, this \$1,000 hiring credit is a very important element. Could the hon. member talk a bit about how important it is to his area and to all Canadians?

Mr. Larry Miller: Mr. Speaker, I come from the business side and I believe my colleague does. A number of small business owners in my riding have told me that this credit just might make the difference between hiring one employee and hiring two employees. It is the right direction. Our goal in this budget and in Bill C-13 is to create jobs and economic activity, and that is exactly what it will do.

• (1240)

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join the debate on Bill C-15. I would call the title of the bill "the bill with no real plan to create jobs". Why do I say that? It has been extremely disappointing to see the tremendous disconnect between the Conservative government's policies and the tough realities that people face in urban and rural communities alike.

Given the global economic uncertainty and the fact that 1.4 million Canadians are out of work, one would have thought that when the government introduced its budget implementation bill, it would have had one priority focus economically, and that being to create jobs. This is not the case. Unfortunately, there is no plan to create jobs in the bill.

Today we have over 500,000 fewer net full-time jobs than we had before the recession. The government's continual crowing about having created jobs is false. It measured from the trough of the recession to today. However, we have to look at where we were in August 2008. Today we have 525,000 fewer net full-time jobs than we had before. That is a crisis. It is a real human crisis for the constituencies of many of my colleagues across the aisle. For example, Nanaimo has an unemployment rate of 16%. For youth, unemployment is far too high.

On top of this net loss of jobs, we have a million new Canadians in our country since that time. Therefore, there are a far greater number of people looking for work with no plan to recover those jobs.

Instead of helping to create jobs, the government's budget is helping to kill jobs. I am referring to the increased EI payroll taxes that have increased by \$600 million in 2011 and will increase by another \$600 million in 2012. Everyone knows these taxes placed on both the employees and the employers kill job creation. Yet that is what the government is doing, despite repeated requests from the Liberal caucus to hold off on that EI payroll tax increase.

The Conservatives know payroll tax increases kill jobs. In January 2009 the Minister of Finance said, "For many businesses, an increase in payroll taxes would make it harder to sustain existing jobs".

In May 2009 the current Minister of Foreign Affairs said, "That is what Canadians do not want, a job-killing payroll tax increase. Those of us on this side of the House will not...raise taxes".

The last quote is from the Conservative government's 2008 election policy declaration, which states, "unnecessarily high payroll taxes are a tax on job creation. Lower payroll taxes encourage hiring and business expansion".

Why is the Conservative government and its members ignoring their own wisdom? Let us think about it.

The Liberals and the economists have both said that this is not the time to raise EI payroll taxes. The government has claimed that it has no control over the EI tax increases. Therefore, one would assume it recognizes that is a negative factor for which it has claimed to have no control.

Recently the government actually appeared to have control over this and it reduced the proposed increase by 50% for 2012. That is a good thing. However, if it can reduce it by 50%, why not by 100% and just hold off on EI payroll tax increases? Why does it claim it has no control over something that it does have control over? It speaks to the heart of citizens' trust in what their government has to say. This is a government that has been repeatedly undermining that trust.

The members opposite have been crowing about the hiring credit for small businesses worth \$165 million, which in fact is small change when the increases are costing \$1.2 billion. That is an insult, not a policy.

• (1245)

Canada has about one million small businesses, but over 600,000 would not qualify for this credit. Therefore, I hope the government

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would continue to make the reductions in the EI payroll tax increase that we have asked for and bring it down to a zero increase.

Also, there is nothing in the budget that reflects the concerns of female business owners. Here is some information from the Taskforce for Women's Business Growth.

In 2007 women retained ownership in almost half of Canada's small and medium-sized enterprises. In 16% of our SMEs, women were majority owners. That is a major force in the small business landscape. However, 37% of the majority female-owned businesses are considered high growth, while 63% of majority male-owned small businesses are considered high growth. Why that discrepancy?

There are some historical and structural factors that make it tougher for women to grow their businesses. Therefore, the task force and its members have asked for some very reasonable support from the government to facilitate the job growth in small and medium-sized businesses owned by women. They are not asking for a handout. They are asking for some assistance in coordinating, consolidating and communicating.

The task force wants the government to: consolidate existing small business program information and target it to women; improve financial and technology literacy for women business owners; increase access to growth capital, grants and other resources, which women historically have found more difficult to access; and, report on the economic contributions of women to the Canadian economy.

These are very reasonable requests, but I do not see them anywhere in the government's budget. These individuals are struggling where they could be contributing \$2 billion a year to the Canadian economy simply through a 20% increase in total revenues in majority female-owned enterprises. That is doable. The government should provide some framework for assistance.

Speaking of individuals, a huge concern that Liberals have is the deliberate exclusion of low-income Canadians in the budget. By that I am referring to the non-refundable tax credits, and there are several of them such as the family caregiver, volunteer firefighter and children's art tax credit. Since these are non-refundable tax credits, it means they would only apply to taxes owing. Therefore, those families and children who are in households without a taxable income, the very people who need assistance the most, are cut out. These programs would not increase the number of people engaged in these good and worthwhile activities because it is targeted at families that already have the means to do that.

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In fact, this kind of program increases inequality in our country. We know that income inequality leads to many decreases in social well-being. A lot of evidence has proven that. Increased income inequality leads to higher crime rates, worse health and mental health outcomes, greater child mortality and a whole host of social ills.

We need to work toward income equality. However, this is not the direction Canada is going in and the gap in income is increasing. These non-refundable tax credits are simply unbelievable and will increase income inequality.

I had a meeting with small businesses in Vancouver Quadra. A number of measures were requested, but they are nowhere to be seen in the government's budget. I consider it a failure and I will vote against Bill C-13. The government has no real plan to create jobs.

• (1250)

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague was here when I asked a question of the member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound and I talked to him about the tax credit for family caregivers. He told me that he was aware there were needs and that maybe in the future they can build on it.

When I try to tackle a problem in a difficult situation, I start by talking to those who are most affected. So I start with people with the lowest incomes. I start by giving them refundable tax credits. I start with the people who are most affected.

I would like to hear what she has to say about that. Who does she think should logically be the first to benefit from tax credits or measures affecting certain people?

[English]

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, I could not agree more with the insights of my colleague from the New Democratic Party. I congratulate her on her quick grasp of the essence of what government should be about, which is reducing some of these inequalities while stimulating a healthy economy and productivity in Canada.

With the previous Liberal platform, we had a billion dollars to support home caregivers and it was refundable. Therefore, those with low non-taxable income would also benefit from that small amount of assistance. The Conservative government's program is far more measly and it cuts out those who need the assistance most.

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member talks about tax credits. Just six years ago, when the Liberal Party was in government, it never offered those. It never offered tax credits for the arts. It never offered a tax credit for physical fitness. It never offered a tax credit to firefighters. Just this past weekend in Hamilton I was at an announcement with firefighters and they were overjoyed that they finally would get this. They had been asking for it for years and years, even dating back to Liberal times.

I would like to ask the member if she is really concerned about the Canadian economy and jobs. The Canadian Steel Producers Association, the Canadian Welding Bureau and the United Steelworkers were here this morning. They all asked that we pass this budget and get the capital cost allowance reduction in place so they could invest and create jobs. Is she going to vote against this?

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, first, support for volunteer firefighters was a platform of the Liberal Party, which we were pleased to see the members opposite steal and put into their budget. I thank them for that. However, they did it wrong. They did it in such a way as to undermine income inequality in their own communities. Those volunteer firefighters who need it the most are watching the bus drive by, bringing taxpayer funding to those volunteer firefighters who already have a good, decent income. This is emblematic of the Conservative government's approach.

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's comments and emphasis on job creation. There are a couple of specific initiatives in my province related to job creation that I would like to raise, specifically as it relates to the discontinuance of the various infrastructure funding programs.

In the Charlottetown harbour of my province, the oyster fishery has been decimated because only the city and the province are prepared to cost share in a solution. The federal government is not. We are missing opportunities with respect to green energy and the diversity of our economy because successive campaign promises have been made by all parties, except the Conservatives, to share in the funding of a cable to the mainland for green energy.

Would my colleague comment on the discontinuance of infrastructure funds and their impact on the ability to create jobs in our country?

• (1255)

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, in my economic listening tour across rural southeast British Columbia, people said that the federal Conservative government was missing in action in the vital partnerships, especially for our rural areas. I want to confirm that this kind of infrastructure is about productivity for the future. It is about jobs for the future. It has long term benefits, not just immediate shovels in the ground for whatever project in Muskoka can bend the ear of the minister.

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Brampton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always a privilege to rise in the House, representing the people of Brampton West, especially to talk about today's subject.

The bill is a low tax plan for jobs and economic growth. It is the next phase of Canada's economic action plan, that will support Canada's economic recovery and promote job creation.

As we have all heard many times in the House, Canada's economic performance has won praise around the world. The World Economic Forum has declared Canada's financial system the soundest in the world for the fourth year in a row. We have also had the strongest job growth in the G7, creating nearly 600,000 jobs since July 2009.

We will have, according to the International Monetary Fund, the strongest economic growth of the G7 over the next two years. *Forbes*, the influential business magazine, has ranked Canada as the best country in the world for business.

While this is positive news, we must remain aware of the fragile economic conditions that exist in Europe and the United States. We are not isolated from the economic challenges outside our borders. That is why we must stay the course and implement the next phase of Canada's economic action plan so that we can maintain economic growth and job creation.

I would like to speak to a few of the many important features contained in the keeping Canada's economy and jobs growing act, and discuss how they will benefit my constituents in Brampton West.

As everybody in the House knows, our Conservative government believes in low taxes and leaving more money where it belongs: in the pockets of hard-working Canadians and in the hands of businesses, like those in my riding.

I am proud to say that we have cut taxes in every way that government collects them. We have cut personal taxes. We have cut consumption taxes. We have cut business taxes, excise taxes and much more. We have cut taxes over 120 times since 2006, reducing the overall tax burden to its lowest level in this country in over 50 years.

The next phase of Canada's economic action plan builds on our government's low tax record and contains even more initiatives to promote job creation and economic growth. For example, the bill proposes to extend the accelerated capital cost allowance to help manufacturers and processors make new investments in manufacturing and processing machinery and equipment.

I have heard first-hand from my constituents over and over again how important this will be to our local businesses. It is allowing Canadian businesses to invest in machinery and equipment that will allow them to be more competitive in the global economy.

There is also the temporary hiring credit for small businesses, which will allow small business owners to hire additional employees, creating more jobs and strengthening the economy of the country and the local economy of Brampton West.

The bill contains more support for my community. Bramptonians have already seen the benefits of our government's economic action plan. The City of Brampton has received millions of dollars through this plan for a number of infrastructure and transit projects.

For example, the government invested in the AcceleRide bus rapid transit system, which over time will help reduce traffic congestion, strengthen the economy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions throughout the greater Toronto area. These initiatives have also created numerous jobs in Brampton, of further benefit to our local economy.

Included in the bill is the permanent annual investment of \$2 billion in the gas tax fund to provide predictable, long-term financing for cities and towns. The mayor of Brampton has welcomed this initiative. She has said:

This budget reaffirms the federal government's belief that the best way to deliver high-quality infrastructure projects at the local level is to partner directly with

municipalities. Like other cities across the country, the City of Brampton has seen first-hand how successful this approach can be.

Thanks to the gas tax fund, the City of Brampton has been able to undertake major infrastructure projects. The continuation of this fund will allow more necessary projects to get under way.

In addition, the bill includes the youth crime prevention initiative: \$20 million will be dedicated to promote programs that will help youth resist or exit gangs. Community safety is a top priority in my riding, and this initiative will help make our streets safer.

● (1300)

This bill also contains continued support for our seniors. Our government recognizes that our seniors helped to build this great country and no other government has taken larger steps toward supporting our seniors than this government. This bill includes initiatives such as enhancing the GIS, where eligible low-income seniors would receive additional annual benefits of up to \$600 for single seniors and \$840 for couples. This would help more than 680,000 seniors across Canada.

Moreover, this bill includes improved financial assistance for students, with initiatives such as the extension on tax relief for skills certification exams. This would make all occupational, trade and professional exam fees eligible for tax relief through the tuition tax credit. These initiatives would allow more people from my riding to attend and graduate from post-secondary education.

The last specific feature I would like to discuss is the phase-out of the per-vote subsidy for political parties. Governments have a duty to use taxpayer dollars wisely and only in the public interest, especially in a time of fiscal restraint when families are struggling to make ends meet. Our government has always opposed the direct taxpayer subsidies that are paid to political parties and believes that the parties should rely primarily on their supporters for their financing. The vast majority of people I have talked to in Brampton West agree. Our government is following through on our campaign to gradually reduce the per-vote subsidy until it is completely eliminated by 2015-16, which would save \$30 million. Phasing out this subsidy would allow the parties to adjust to their loss of income by stepping up their fundraising efforts. As such, they would find themselves in more contact with Canadians.

A number of colleagues have pointed out that this bill has been debated for a long time. Initially tabled in the House in March, we are now dealing with the implementation of the second phase of the bill. We are in the last part of the process that deals with the budget that was presented. Both the NDP and the Liberals turned that down in the spring and decided it was time for an election. During that election, Canadians decided it was time to get things done and they gave our government a strong mandate so that we could move the budget process forward. It is important to get this bill passed without delay.

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Despite the challenges we face in the global economy, our government is successfully implementing the next phase of Canada's economic action plan. Our government continues to be focused on what matters to Canadians: creating jobs, promoting economic growth and lowering taxes. This bill, the keeping Canada's economy and jobs growing act, does just that.

As the member of Parliament for Brampton West, I am pleased to support this bill that provides continuous tax relief and support to my riding's businesses, seniors and families. This plan is working. We must continue to stay the course, as our Conservative government delivers on its strong mandate to help Canadian families and our economy.

[Translation]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a simple question for my Conservative colleague.

Bill C-13 is called Keeping Canada's Economy and Jobs Growing Act. For months now, the NDP has been talking about a significant measure to stimulate job creation and give some tax relief to the job creators that create more than half of new jobs in Canada—small and medium-sized businesses, or SMEs.

Will the Conservative government commit to lowering the small and medium-sized business tax rate from 11% to 9%, as the NDP has been calling for? It is a very simple question. I want to see if the Conservative government can show some leadership and support our entrepreneurs who work so hard and if it can support our SMEs and create more jobs in the regions.

● (1305)

[English]

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Mr. Speaker, here on this side of the House we certainly do not need to be given lectures on lowering taxes by members on that side of the House, who have repeatedly indicated in campaign after campaign that they would raise taxes. They have talked about increasing the GST. They have talked about increasing personal income taxes. We on this side of the House have cut taxes, as I said in my speech, over 120 times since 2006. It is a record we are proud of and that we are going to continue as long as we are the government in this country.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I think I caught the quote, but forgive me if this is incorrect because we do not have *Hansard*. The hon. member for Brampton West said that governments have a duty to use funds wisely and that is why they oppose tax dollars going to political parties.

The bulk of tax dollars going to political parties is for matters not related to the \$2 per vote, which is the fairest and most democratic system that we have for public campaign financing.

Is the government now planning to at least reduce the subsidy in the form of credits for donations? Charitable institutions in this country would love to get 75% back on donations of up to \$400.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Mr. Speaker, reducing the subsidies for political parties is important, number one. I hear over and over again that Canadians do not want their taxpayer dollars being given to parties to support their activities. They think that parties should be able to raise the funds necessary to run their election campaigns.

I do take interest in my friend's suggestion that we should look at whether people making donations to charitable organizations should receive a better tax credit. Perhaps that is something she should speak to members on this side of the House about. I am certainly in favour of supporting charities with a system like that.

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not know if the member for Brampton West is number one or number two when it comes to the size of his riding, but it is one of the largest ridings in the country. I thank the member for the work he has done.

What amazes me is that the opposition is talking about voting against this budget bill that helps to create jobs in terms of the credit for small businesses, supporting communities through the gas tax funding, the family caregiver tax credit. There are a number of things we are doing in this bill that they will be voting against.

When the member was back in his riding, as we all were in our ridings last week, did he hear from his constituents about how important these items are to the families and to the communities which he represents?

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Mr. Speaker, I did have the opportunity to spend a lot of time in my riding last week. I did hear, over and over again, how important these initiatives that are contained in the budget are.

I can specifically recall meeting with several people in the manufacturing community. They think the accelerated capital cost allowance in this budget is critical for them. It gives them the opportunity to reinvest in new equipment and machinery to make them more competitive in the global economy, and that is critical these days.

The economy is difficult. The global economy is very competitive. It is an important measure. I know it is supported in my constituency.

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I feel it is very important to rise today in the House to speak out against Bill C-13, which combines a myriad of proposals. If we could take the time to analyze them one by one, we would have the opportunity to debate a number of important issues. But these proposals are wrapped up in a single bill, which means we cannot debate them. That is an affront to democracy. We are not able to take the time needed to explain the details of each proposal in this bill to the Canadian people.

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This bill is an empty shell. As my colleague from Marc-Aurèle-Fortin said earlier, the Conservatives make a great many extravagant announcements. They say they will be investing in a number of areas, but if we look at the details, we see these investments are superficial. There is no real, concrete, strategic plan for stimulating the economy and creating local, sustainable jobs. Jobs that do not pay enough and that keep people living below the poverty line are not helpful.

I would like to suggest some concrete ways to really help Canadian families. Consider the health care system. As we all know, thousands of families do not have access to family doctors and nurses at this time. There is a personnel shortage in the health care system. It is a problem everywhere, in all provinces and territories. Hospitals and clinics do not have enough human resources. The public health care system is particularly short-staffed. The Conservatives have not done much to prevent private services from taking a larger share of health care. The bigger the private sector becomes, the bigger the gap between the poor and the wealthy when it comes to access to health care, even though poorer people are the ones who need health care the most.

Earlier, my colleague from Abitibi—Témiscamingue explained, as have many others, that family caregivers need a great deal of help. The Conservatives are always telling us over and over about the tax credit for family caregivers; however, that tax credit can only benefit people who make enough money. Most family caregivers do not have enough income to benefit from tax credits. Why would the government not grant direct tax benefits instead, which would really help these people? That would put money directly into the pockets of people who help families who are in need because of health problems and other concerns. This would be a concrete, positive, constructive measure for family caregivers.

Still in the area of health, we have to invest in home care to allow people to maintain their independence and remain active. I am on the Standing Committee on Health and I am our deputy health critic. Every week since October, witnesses have been coming to the committee to tell us that, as far as chronic illnesses are concerned, the government must invest in creating a strategic plan for healthy eating and urban planning in order to allow people to have an active lifestyle. Simply improving the public's eating habits would help unburden the health care system. It would also create jobs.

● (1310)

There are already a number of farmers, growers and fresh food producers in our regions, in Canada, who could supply food to seniors living on very low incomes who do not have the means to buy fruit and vegetables. Fruit and vegetables should be a staple in our diet. A number of health experts who have come to testify at the Standing Committee on Health have said that seniors cannot afford to buy fruit and vegetables. That is appalling. There are plenty of farmers who want nothing more than to offer their products at local markets and grocery stores at affordable prices. This is basic nutrition. We could make use of it in schools and hospitals, but the government lacks leadership on the issue.

Another aspect of health is physical activity. The provinces are trying to promote physical activity and healthy living, but problems related to obesity and diabetes are on the rise. The federal

government should invest more in helping the provinces and territories in their promotion and prevention efforts.

A number of people and organizations such as those that support seniors have managed to implement projects in more than 500 cities in Canada, including over 300 in Quebec. The purpose of these projects is to configure cities differently and adapt them to more active living. This may involve ensuring that sidewalks are safe for seniors and the children of young families and having more green space in neighbourhoods, which in turn encourages people to use local services, drive less, walk more and get together. In addition to making neighbourhoods livelier, it would encourage people to be physically active.

We have many suggestions just in the area of health. The Conservatives often say that the opposition makes few suggestions. I just provided five in the area of health. We can provide more. With regard to public safety, we could create more jobs, except that the Conservatives are once again being very contradictory.

They say that they want to promote local employment. I will repeat that, in my riding, an entire section of the border is not protected. RCMP officers told me last week that closing the Franklin border crossing has been and continues to be a nuisance for them. There has been a resurgence of smuggling and crime, and people can cross the border between official crossings because of the decrease in surveillance. The customs officers who worked at the former Franklin border crossing also provided security and surveillance. Now there is none, because of the Conservatives' decision.

I see my time is nearly up and I will move on to another matter. There is not much in the budget, Bill C-13, in terms of the environment. In my riding, the budget for the St. Francis Lake National Wildlife Area was cut by 56% even though it attracts more than 5,000 tourists every year. It is located in Dundee, a point of access to the United States and to the Akwesasne Mohawk Reserve.

We keep hearing that Canada is trying to encourage ties with first nations communities. Instead, the government is cutting funding and many people are losing their jobs. To make matters worse, the jobs that are being lost are green, sustainable and local. There are many small measures like this that are negatively affecting our local and national economy. In Quebec alone, the budgets of four other wildlife areas have been cut. Canada has a total of 51 national wildlife areas. Why does the government have to cut funding to a profitable area?

Bill C-13 does not promote the local economy and does even less for the national economy. I am asking the Conservatives to be open and accommodating and to include our proposals in their budget.

● (1315)

[English]

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague indicated that she is the health critic for her party, and I applaud her in that role.

Government Orders

One of the challenges that all of us, as members of Parliament from all across Canada, are aware of is the challenge of trying to have medical doctors and nurse practitioners settle into remote and rural areas. I know of many communities that have set up formal committees to recruit medical personnel into their underserved areas.

I wonder if the member is aware that this budget would provide student loan forgiveness for medical doctors and nurses who work in rural and remote areas. Practising physicians would be eligible for a federal Canada student loan forgiveness of up to \$8,000 per year to a maximum of \$40,000, and nurse practitioners would be eligible for federal student loan forgiveness up to \$4,000 per year to a maximum of \$20,000. It seems to me that this is a great initiative to encourage medical doctors and nurse practitioners to settle in rural and remote areas.

Will the member stand in this place and vote in support of a measure that would improve health care for rural Canadians?

• (1320)

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member opposite for raising this issue.

It allows me to say that this measure does encourage doctors and nurses to move to the regions. However, if more health care professionals do not enter the system, how will it become more effective? If health care professionals simply move from urban to rural areas, there will be a problem in the urban areas. More money must therefore be invested in training, and not just in loans. Bursaries must also be given because, once people get into debt, that heavy financial burden does not help.

We must increase the number of doctors and nurses and we must improve infrastructure to encourage them to move to the regions.

There is no national public transit system. Improvements must be made in this regard in order to attract people to the regions and keep them there. We must not just give out loans. A comprehensive approach is needed and, in order for it to be effective, it must be incorporated in such a way that it brings together all these components. All these things must be done in conjunction with one another.

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague for her wonderful display of humanity and sense of community.

I would like my colleague to explain to the House why we need to invest in public services for youth to ensure that they are strong and healthy and prepared to help our country grow, and, therefore, why we need to create an environment that promotes economic growth. I am talking, in particular, about youth dropout rates and health. The government could introduce measures that would create a lot of jobs for this next generation. Why does my colleague think we should invest in the community?

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Mr. Speaker, I thank my NDP colleague.

It is important to invest in the community and in young people because they are the people who will build and continue to build our country. If we want to get people involved, we must first give them

the opportunity to do so, to make a commitment and to find themselves. It would be a positive measure to give young people more opportunities and see where they can get involved.

Prevention is one aspect of health: if we are more active, we are healthier and more productive. Being healthy helps the economy. All of that is related, just like the economy and the environment. If we want to enjoy our environment, we must first take care of it. So we must invest in all areas, without leaving a single one out. Together they make a complete package.

[English]

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to rise today on behalf of the constituents of Kitchener—Conestoga in favour of Bill C-13, the keeping Canada's economy and jobs growing act. I rise today proud of our government's record, the best fiscal record in the industrialized world.

I rise today recognizing the accomplishment as even more significant when we examine the state of our largest market to the south and I rise today in recognition that these challenges confront us still, that the global economic uncertainty which inspired Canada's economic action plan remains with us today.

Government does not create jobs, but government can create and foster an environment in which jobs are created. We cannot force businesses to conduct research or invest in their own competitiveness, but we can encourage innovation. Canada's federal government cannot fix the world's economy, but we can ensure that we are poised to seize on the best opportunities as the world recovers.

However, we also have responsibilities beyond today's economy. Members of the House must ensure that a stronger country is left for our children, not only a stronger economy. It is with these thoughts in mind that I stand in favour of the keeping Canada's economy and jobs growing act.

Before budget 2011, this Conservative government had already cut taxes over 120 times. Over one million lower income Canadians were removed from the tax rolls altogether by this government, 85,000 of them seniors. We introduced tax free savings accounts which offer lower and moderate income earners the ability to save their hard-earned money without the disincentive of taxation.

Last week in Waterloo region we celebrated entrepreneur week. This week-long festival dedicated to the entrepreneurial spirit reminds me that it was this government that declared 2011 to be the year of the entrepreneur. We all know the numbers. We understand that the vast majority of jobs created in Canada are created by entrepreneurs running small or medium-sized businesses.

Last week, Communitech inducted several business people into the Waterloo region entrepreneur hall of fame. One of the recipients, Carol Leaman of PostRank compared starting a business with another profession entirely. An entrepreneur, she said, is like a skydiver. They both jump out of planes from great heights, but only entrepreneurs are expected to make their parachutes as they fall toward the ground. The metaphor is clear. Our entrepreneurs are willing to risk their time, their savings and their available credit, everything they have, in the dream of building a business.

Iain Klugman, Communitech president and CEO, put the challenge for us as policy-makers even more clearly. He stated, "If you don't have people who bet the farm you don't have a strong economy. Entrepreneurs drive the economy".

This government has worked hard since our first minority mandate to unshackle our entrepreneurs. I am pleased this work has continued in budget 2011. We have instituted a new hiring credit for small business that will provide up to \$1,000 against a small firm's EI premiums for new hires. We have offered new and increased support to young entrepreneurs to build the next generation of global business leaders. We are focused on building a stronger Canada, better able to withstand global challenges.

Under this Prime Minister and this finance minister, Canada withstood the recession better than any other country. Thanks to this Prime Minister and this finance minister, Canada will emerge stronger from this period of global uncertainty. The measures in this budget build upon work done in previous budgets, an economic action plan that kept Canada leading the world, an economic action plan that opposition parties consistently failed to support.

Over the past six years, our government has lowered personal income taxes, corporate income taxes and the small business tax rate. We have increased the amount that Canadians can earn before being taxed. We made it easier for seniors by instituting pension splitting. We have introduced choice in child care through the universal child care benefit and passed the children's fitness credit. All of these positions were supported by Canadians and none of them were supported by the opposition.

While we have worked hard to keep Canadians working, we have also put in place measures to protect families. In years past, we overcame opposition objections to help Canadians through new items like the registered disability savings plan, the first time home buyers' plan, the public transit tax credit and an expanded home buyers' tax credit.

● (1325)

Today we are asking for support on new measures to help Canadians: measures to help students afford the costs of post-secondary education such as allowing them to earn more without having their loans clawed back; measures to help Canadians pay for the health care they need such as removing the limit on medical expenses they can claim on their taxes, or to take time to care for their loved ones through the family caregiver tax credit; and measures to make homes more energy efficient by extending the eco-energy retrofit program.

Budget 2011 will provide low income seniors with some much needed relief by increasing the guaranteed income supplement payments they will receive by as much as \$600 for single seniors and as much as \$840 for couples. There are no surprises in this budget. We stand clearly in favour of lower taxes and balanced books. We stand for long-term sustainable growth and we stand for the family.

These times are unprecedented for the modern Canadian family. While the experts seem to agree that Canada has emerged from the recession, our major trading partners remain mired in doubt and uncertainty. I am grateful to the finance minister for extending vital programs in times like these, programs like work sharing which

allows viable employers to retain critical talent during lean times and which allows employees to work reduced hours until times improve.

Government Orders

Several companies in my riding of Kitchener—Conestoga have unfortunately been in the position to use the work share program. Ontario Drive & Gear was one of those companies. Thanks to support from this government, ODG remains one of Wilmot Township's largest employers. ODG President Joerg Stieber was also named to the Waterloo region entrepreneur hall of fame last week. He said, "The foundation of our success is really in the hard work and dedication of the good people who work at ODG."

The people are what is important. Work share allowed ODG to keep the staff in whose skills it had invested so much and it allowed the employees to remain gainfully employed rather than left out of work.

Kuntz Electroplating, one of the largest employers in the city of Kitchener, would tell a very similar story. Work share, to put it simply, keeps Canadian employers and employees working. But there are Canadians who are more vulnerable in an economic downturn than the average worker. I speak in this case of young Canadians who may not have had the experience or the networks that they need to find that first job and older Canadians who have trouble finding that new career when laid off during the end of their working lives.

To help new entrants to the job market, budget 2011 will make all trade, occupational and professional exam fees tax deductible. It will allow students pursuing a degree or diploma to earn twice as much money before their loans are clawed back. It ends discrimination against part-time students by reducing the interest they must pay on their Canada student loans.

This government recognizes that education is a provincial responsibility, but that our global economic competitiveness is an issue of federal importance and we are willing to act.

Canada's seniors will benefit from budget 2011. This government has already done so much for seniors. After 13 years of empty Liberal promises, this Conservative government introduced pension income splitting and removed 85,000 seniors from the tax rolls altogether. In fact, this government has delivered to Canada's seniors over \$2.3 billion in tax relief since taking office.

Budget 2011 builds on that solid foundation promising to enhance the GIS payments made to low income seniors, but just as importantly, budget 2011 will also extend the targeted initiative for older workers.

Government Orders

I stand firmly in favour of passing Bill C-13, the keeping Canada's economy and jobs growing act. It puts us on a path to surplus while investing in Canada's most critical assets, our people.

• (1330)

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government seems to have difficulty distinguishing between spending investment and infrastructure. It often likes to talk about how we in the NDP love taxes or other such rhetoric, but let us look at how much the government is wasting taxpayers' dollars in terms of its spending in its infrastructure program.

The government talks about cutting waste, but let us talk about waste. Some 26 million taxpayers' dollars were spent on advertising for the economic action plan in the three months running up to the 2011 election; \$3 million on signs put across the country; and tracking weekly the signs of 18 different departments and agencies.

On this bill, how much is the government planning to spend on advertising, signs and useless, wasteful spending of taxpayers' dollars?

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Speaker, how very much like the NDP to pull numbers out of a hat and throw them around as if they are, in fact, facts, which I very much question.

The important facts to keep on the table today are that the average Canadian families today are paying \$3,000 less in income tax than they were when this government took office, that over 600,000 people are working today, and that more than 600,000 net new jobs have been created since the downturn of 2009. Those are facts that are verifiable. We get the records regularly.

I would really encourage the NDP to get its facts straight and then ensure it gives the Canadians we are here to represent the actual truth in the matter.

• (1335)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, just to pick up on that point and look to the member to acknowledge that there are a half million fewer full-time jobs today in the Canadian economy than there were in 2008.

One of the things that I think is really lacking is the government's will to recognize the valuable contributions that we could be making, in terms of housing, investing in our housing stock, and providing incentives for inner city-type housing renewal programs and all sorts of programs that would ultimately improve the quality of our housing stock while at the same time creating thousands of jobs.

Would the member indicate where, within the documents that he has at his fingertips, does it elaborate on just how the government is dealing with Canada's aging housing stock?

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Speaker, I do not have the actual figures at my fingertips and I am not going to make them up like so often happens in this place.

What I can say is that there is no government in recent history that has invested more in Canada's social housing stock than this government. In fact, in the Waterloo region, my own region, there have been incredible investments. We work with community partners that come to the table with a great objective, a great idea, and they partner with the Canadian government, the Ontario

government, and, in our case, the Waterloo regional government to create amazing projects.

More importantly, there are other more foundational changes that this document, Bill C-13, would implement that all of our members should be supporting when it comes to allowing students to earn money. Students do not just want handouts. They want to be able to earn money and not have it clawed back off of their student loans.

This budget would implement that. I cannot understand why members on that side stand and vote against these great initiatives.

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Kitchener—Conestoga for his fine speech and the excellent work he does on the Hill, including being a leader at committee with regard to palliative and compassionate care, with which he is heavily involved.

Part of the budget has a family caregiver tax credit, which I know is an issue, and he talked about seniors in his speech. Why is it important for these to be included in the bill?

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for highlighting the work of the palliative care committee. We hope to release our report later this week.

Certainly, compassion extended to those who are vulnerable in our society has to be one of our primary objectives as members of Parliament. I am thrilled to see that our government recognized that in this budget, including removing the limit on medical expenses and also introducing the new family caregiver tax credit. This \$2,000 credit would be for caregivers who are helping those who face a debilitating illness.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in the chamber to speak to Bill C-13 and participate in the debate.

I will start with the caregivers tax credit and point out some of the problems with this overall government agenda and strategy. The government often announces programs. That was done well by the Mike Harris Ontario government when it had one dump truck full of \$1 million in cash and would literally move that from community to community announcing program after program and service after service. However, nobody could really access it. Nobody could really get the necessary support that the government was promoting in the programs.

We have seen that with the current government and with previous governments where there would be billions of dollars in slippage or money that never actually went out the door because the mandates and the criteria for those incentives did not work well with either the taxpayers, citizens in general or with the businesses the government was trying to support in terms of new programs and services.

Government Orders

This tax credit for caregivers is another one. It is something I am fairly familiar with. I worked for the Association for Persons with Physical Disabilities for five years and with Community Living Mississauga for about three years helping people who needed assistance and caregiving. These people did not qualify for unemployment, did not have proper medical support and would not be able to take advantage of a tax credit. That is an important issue that we need to acknowledge. The tax credit that is being proposed would literally be dangled in front of some Canadians but would not be available for others. It is building inequality.

We have a middle-class that is shrinking. All of the evidence supports that, especially given what we have gone through with the recent economic recession and what is happening in the global economy. This would create a separate class of people who have access to caregivers, leaving the rest behind because they are too poor. How is that fair? How does that stand in a budget for a country that is supposed to be known for social justice, humanity and not leaving people behind? How does it even get to the point where the Conservatives are getting up here proudly celebrating the fact that some Canadians will get the support they need?

I can the House that support is critical. We are talking about people being able to have a bath, have their homes cleaned and live in better and humane conditions. These are critical elements. I have done that work myself. We are talking about people who need assistance right now to improve their quality of life but will not get it because they do not have enough money, are not rich enough or do not make enough.

How is it possible that members can stand in the chamber to support a program like that? I do not understand that logic. I cannot see through it. I cannot see how the Conservatives can brag about segregating people who have physical and mental impairments or disabilities into classes of those who will get that service and those who will not.

I thought we were supposed to be helping the people who are worse off in this country. I think about the people I served who, at that time, were put into institutions. After being institutionalized, they were released between the ages of 30 and 40 and were left to the wind because there was not enough support. They had never worked before and never had the opportunity to be part of the community. If they were lucky, they got into programs like mine and, if we were lucky, we would be able to get them a job and train them. We would go on site.

A lot of measures are required to ensure that people who have physical or psychological impairments can re-enter or enter the workforce. A lot of training has to happen. There are front-line support workers. It took a lot of effort. It would often require a government program with significant resources but at the end of the day it was worth it. We proved that for every dollar the government put into our program we saved it \$3 in welfare.

When those people came through the door, we did not look at their income bracket to determine whether they could get support. We did not tell them that they were too impoverished and that, although they needed the service, we would give it to someone else who could afford it because he or she could get a tax break.

• (1340)

How is that fair? What some of these caregivers can do is prevent people from going to a hospital. They can help people get structure around their life so they can work part-time. It is all important and it is all related.

How can people go for an interview or be involved in their community if basic hygiene is a problem for them. They may have a problem physically or they have a problem doing that work in their house? Their apartment or house or wherever they live can create an impediment for them going out into the community.

What we are saying with this tax credit is that those Canadians who have the biggest insurmountable elements in their life will be left behind. They will not get that assistance. Their neighbour might, if their neighbour has enough money or makes enough money. We know from the evidence that most people in Canadian society will not be able to take advantage of this tax credit.

I have a hard time understanding the logic in this. How can anyone actually get up and proudly say that this will be separated to ensure Canadians have two options: one, nothing; and two, others will get their tax credit back and they will get assistance.

I think the philosophy that the government has adopted about winners and losers has really turned Canada upside down. It is picking winners and losers right now. That is what it is doing with the Wheat Board and with other issues. It is very divisive, which is unfortunate.

We need to start looking at why we cannot afford this tax credit for all Canadians. The government is making some poor choices, between prisons and planes. It is important to talk about some of the choices with regard to tax cuts that are taking place right now.

Since we are in a fiscal deficit, we have been borrowing money from ourselves to pay interest on tax cuts largely for profitable corporations. It is not for the ones that are value-added and have been struggling during this process, like the manufacturing sector in my home town. It has been struggling but it does not benefit from a tax cut because it is not making a profit.

What ends up happening is that the oil and gas industry benefits and the pharmaceutical companies benefit. All the companies, ironically, that are doing extremely well right now are also getting massive subsidies. Those companies get them for fossil fuels. They get fuel subsidies and they will continue to get them.

The interesting thing is that we are not even talking corporate tax reductions. We are talking about some of what the oil and gas industry gets in terms of subsidies. I would ask members to listen to a few of these: the flow-through share subsidy, the Canadian exploration expense subsidy, the Canadian developmental expense subsidy and the Canadian oil and gas property expense subsidy. All those together add up to \$1.256 billion in lost tax revenue since 2008 alone.

Government Orders

We are still paying for those subsidies because we actually borrowed money. It is just like the HST. To bring in the HST, the government had to borrow \$6 billion and now it has a debacle going on with British Columbia in this regard. We had Library of Parliament analyze the borrowing costs of the HST. The HST will cost the government, if it pays it over a 10 year cycle at the average interest rate, anywhere between \$6 billion to \$8 billion. We will pay those costs.

I again want to emphasize that a budget does not need to be about winners and losers, which is what this is right here. Some people will do really well and others will not. That is not the Canada I want.

• (1345)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to pick up on the idea of winners and losers.

When I look at the government in terms of one of its many failings, it is in its dealing with seniors. There are many seniors who are experiencing very difficult times. They do not have the necessary funds to purchase the items they need. We are talking about some of the fundamentals, pharmaceuticals and food. It is a quality of life issue.

Would the member give us his personal thoughts in regard to what more he believes the government could have done in terms of being able to better enhance the lifestyle of our seniors from coast to coast?

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, it is a critical issue. I travelled this country a number of years ago pushing for a seniors charter of rights, which actually passed in this House of Commons and which the government has yet to implement.

I would argue that one of the simple things we could do is deal with pensions. Seniors' pensions are a critical issue for so many people. If people enter into a private arrangement with their employer and it is a deferred wage, they earn that wage for the future so as not to rely as much on the public. However, if the company is going bankrupt, why would they be last in line as a creditor? It is unacceptable and unconscionable. That is one of the things the Conservatives could have done. It would not have cost any money and would have been a fair thing to do. It also would save the public purse later on as the senior would have a functioning pension.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting to note the things that my colleague ignores about what this bill would do for seniors. There is no question that we would all like to do more for everybody. However, the reality is that we have done a lot for seniors. We have removed 85,000 seniors from the tax rolls. We have introduced pension income splitting. This budget introduces an enhancement to the guaranteed income supplement of \$600 for single seniors and \$840 for couples, of those who are in the very lowest income tax brackets, those whom my colleague was targeting earlier.

How can they stand and oppose initiatives like this that would make it easier for our most vulnerable seniors?

• (1350)

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have more money allocated in the future for prisons and planes than they do for seniors. It is as simple as that.

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are told that the budget measures in Bill C-13 will make life better for families.

I would like to know what my hon. colleague thinks of the cuts affecting children that have been made by the Conservative government over the past few weeks. Social services and community organizations are sounding the alarm because the government is taking child tax benefits away from the most vulnerable families. To verify whether these measures are justified, they are being asked to fill out a six-page questionnaire. Then it takes time to assess the questionnaire, while families are being deprived of money to pay the rent. This is cruel. What should we be doing instead to help them?

[English]

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, that is a very pertinent question. That is why I was referring to the surpluses that the government sometimes gets and the slippages where it was often referred in terms of departmental money that is never spent. The government creates so many obstacles and so much difficulty that it requires so much assistance, or it does not even bother doing it itself.

We have seen that with the disability tax credit, for example, or the GIS where people need to apply for it instead of just getting it. These are things that the government could have changed that would have actually helped Canadians, especially those on the fringe.

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member spoke about the tax cuts and that they are not helping industry in his riding. I have heard directly from the head of automotive manufacturers in this country about the need to continue along with the tax cut process that we put in place.

Is the member saying that those people, those who create seven to eight jobs for every job they have in their plant, are wrong about our tax cuts?

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, the member is wrong.

Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise in the House at this time to speak in support of Bill C-13, Keeping Canada's Economy and Jobs Growing Act.

Canada has weathered the global recession better than most other industrialized countries. We are the only G7 country to have more than recovered all of the output and all of the jobs lost during the recession. In fact, Canada has posted by far the strongest growth in employment among G7 countries during the recovery. This is in no small measure due to the stellar and diligent work of our Minister of Finance and the extraordinary measures in Canada's economic action plan, which is a road map to improve the well-being of all Canadians over the long run by securing the recovery, eliminating the deficit, and investing in the drivers of long-term economic growth.

The Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance and this government have made protecting Canadian jobs and the economy the top priority. In fact, 600,000 more Canadians are working today than when the recession ended, and nine out of ten of those jobs are full-time positions.

Our government's plan is to strengthen and secure Canada's economic and financial fundamentals. That is why the government has responded to critical situations with flexibility and pragmatism. Its response is designed to keep our economy secure and resilient.

The government, unlike the official opposition, is not bound by ideological dogma, and unlike the third party, by political expediency and opportunism. That is why Canada is held up as a shining example of stability and prudence in an ocean of instability. Doug Porter, deputy chief economist at BMO, said during his appearance at the finance committee in August:

I would say that compared to policy-making in the rest of the world, Canada's economic policy-making has been exemplary. I don't think there's been a significant misstep in recent years.

That is why the global leadership that Canada has displayed since day one of the economic crisis has earned Canada the praise of a number of the world's respected organizations and institutions.

For instance, Canada's banking system has been deemed the world's best for four years running now by the World Economic Forum. The World Bank also said that Canada is the easiest place to start a business in the G7. *Forbes* magazine recently ranked Canada as the best country to do business in. The international credit rating agencies, such as Moody's, Fitch and Standard and Poor's, have all renewed Canada's AAA credit rating. The G20 young entrepreneur summit recently said that Canada is a start-up paradise, an entrepreneurial hotbed of business confidence. The IMF has also praised Canada's deficit reduction plan and has said that Canada is one of two countries that will have the fastest economic growth in the G7 this year and next.

It does not stop there. There is more. The Economic Intelligence Unit says Canada is the best country among the G7 to do business in and will continue to be over the next five years.

The finance committee, of which I am a member, recently concluded its pre-budget consultations. We met with dozens of individuals, associations, businesses, and organizations, both here in Ottawa and around the country. We also received over 600 written submissions.

The overwhelming consensus from our hearings was support for our government's plan. For instance, the Canadian Home Builders' Association stated that:

Today's budget provides a responsible transition from stimulus spending towards creating the conditions that will renew private sector demand and job creation.

Regarding the budget, the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants stated that:

...it strikes the right balance by keeping Canada competitive and demonstrating prudent fiscal management.

All these results do not just fall from the sky. As the Minister of Finance recently stated:

Government Orders

Countries, just like individuals, do not stumble into prosperity. They set out a plan and stick to it, so that they are fully capable of seizing opportunity when misfortune hits, instead of merely being overwhelmed by it.

The government has followed a low-tax plan that has successfully branded Canada as a low-business-tax jurisdiction. Our government paid down substantial amounts of debt before the economic crisis even arrived. By doing so, our government has been successful in keeping net debt to GDP ratio well below G7 counterparts at 34%, while at the same time other countries were piling vast amounts of additional debt onto existing debt.

Under the leadership of our Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance, Canada chose not to go down the road of ruin by recklessly taxing and spending, the path the opposition would have us take. Our government chose rather to support Canadian families by creating jobs, and the average family has over \$3,000 in tax reductions.

Our government's top priority is the economy. Although Canada's economy is outperforming other advanced industrialized countries, Canada is not immune from the impact of events that originate beyond our shores. The Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance have always been very clear about this fact.

• (1355)

Therefore, with the global economy still fragile due to the European sovereign debt and banking crisis, the Minister of Finance announced last week that the government will be reducing the maximum potential increase in next year's EI premium from 10¢ to 5¢ per \$100 of insurable earnings. This measure will leave over \$600 million in the hands of Canadian businesses and workers and their families.

In response to this measure, Dan Kelly, senior vice-president of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, said:

It is clear Finance Minister Flaherty has heard the concerns of Canada's entrepreneurs by taking action to lower the planned EI hike.

The CFIB press release also stated:

This move will reduce the burden of business and leave more money in the pockets of their employees.

To continue to support jobs and growth, the Minister of Finance also announced an additional extension of the successful work-sharing program, which has already benefited some 300,000 workers.

Other measures designed to create jobs and growth included rebuilding the fleets of the Royal Canadian Navy and Canadian Coast Guard, which will create long-term jobs and generate significant economic benefits in shipbuilding and related industries across Canada.

Also announced was the investment of additional funds to modernize and expand the capacity of priority border facilities across Canada.

The Minister of Finance also announced that our government is on track to eliminate the deficit in a balanced and responsible way. We will balance in 2015. This is due to the ongoing financial crisis in Europe and the uncertainty in the United States.

Statements by Members

The Minister of Finance once again demonstrated that our government's top priority is the economy. We will do this through our low-tax plan to create jobs and growth in a way that is both flexible and pragmatic.

In support of this move, the Honourable Perrin Beatty, president and CEO of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, said:

While we understand that the slower economic growth will delay Canada's ability to return to balanced budgets, we agree with the Minister that the government should not be adding to the deficit by increasing spending at this time.

Budget 2011 will preserve Canada's advantage in the global economy. It will strengthen the financial security of Canadian workers. It will give more income security to seniors and families and will provide stability during a fragile and uncertain global recovery.

● (1400)

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order. The hon. member will have three minutes for his speech and five minutes for questions and comments when the House resumes debate on the motion.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

CYBER COP PROGRAM

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadian children are facing a new challenge. The issue of cyber bullying has increased the intensity and frequency of abuse children can face on a daily basis. This means that parents, teachers, lawmakers, and all adults have a duty to step up and put things in place to protect our children.

In my riding, the Truro Police Service has done just that by initiating the Cyber Cop program. Cyber Cop is an innovative program that provides children with the tools they need to combat cyber bullying and practice safe Internet usage.

Coordinator Barry Mingo, Constable Jon Keddy, Constable Todd Taylor and Chief Dave MacNeil all deserve an incredible amount of credit for initiating this program.

Kudos also to mayor Bill Mills and the Truro town council for standing behind the Truro police service, supporting the cyber cop program and stepping up to protect our children.

NAVY LEAGUE OF CANADA

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a great day in Canada today, because the Navy League of Canada is in Ottawa to talk about various issues affecting the Navy League throughout the country.

This organization, one of the finest organizations in the country, has been around for 116 years. It is in over 260 Canadian communities helping out 15,000 young Canadians on issues of maritime affairs, the Royal Canadian Sea Cadets and the Navy League Cadets.

The Navy League of Canada is incorporated with many ex-military personnel from admirals all the way down to chief petty officers. It is truly a wonderful organization. I encourage every member here today to attend the reception, because the Navy League of Canada is one of the finest organizations this country has ever seen.

ALEX THOMSON ROYAL CANADIAN LEGION BRANCH

Mrs. Stella Ambler (Mississauga South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to tell the House about the Alex Thomson Royal Canadian Legion Branch 82, which has been part of the landscape of Mississauga South in Port Credit for more than 80 years, the past 40 on the banks of the scenic Credit River.

The branch is dedicated to the memory of Colonel Alex Thomson, a former Port Credit resident, who was decorated for bravery and killed in action in France during World War I.

Branch 82 is still a wonderful place to meet old friends and new ones, and that is what hundreds of veterans and members of the community of Mississauga South did on Remembrance Day last Friday.

As a new member of the legion, I meet new comrades each time I go. On Friday, it was Phil and George from the Queen's Own Rifles; parade marshal Norm; RCMP officer Ben, who laid the wreath with me and taught me how to march in parade; feisty World War II veteran Vic Morrow, and many others.

I owe special thanks to legion president Kim Reinhart, the ladies' auxiliary—whose shepherd's pie was a huge hit—and the entire team that helped make Branch 82's Remembrance Day ceremonies such a fitting tribute to our local heroes.

Lest we forget.

AIRLINE INDUSTRY

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with the unanimous passage by the House of Commons of my motion concerning airline passenger rights, every Canadian expected the government to enhance protection for the millions of paying customers who travel on airlines each and every year in this country.

The entire Conservative cabinet stood along with every government backbencher to vote for a Canadian airline passenger bill of rights, but before they had time to sit back down in their seats, the Conservatives had already changed their minds on the whole affair. No legislation was ever produced.

Since that time, the European Union has enacted strong legislation to protect airline passengers. In the United States, just weeks ago, the U.S. Congress ratified into law tough new regulations that protect airline passengers from extended waits while on board an aircraft, ensure mandatory compensation for passengers who are bumped due to overbooking and set out compensation for baggage delays and losses.

When will the government enact proper airline passenger protection legislation?

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately there are still many places where people do not enjoy the freedoms that Canadians have.

Lately violence has flared in Egypt at the expense of the Coptic minority, who have been attacked and killed in their places of worship. Our Subcommittee on International Human Rights has just heard testimony about this situation.

Clearly, more has to be done to protect minority rights.

First the extremists who plan and carry out these violent attacks need to be brought to justice, and the government of Egypt must act to physically protect minorities as they go about their daily lives.

As Egypt heads into elections, the transitional government must ensure that these elections are both free and fair, a process that would include inviting international observers to monitor the vote.

When the new Egyptian parliament convenes, the new constitution it writes must ensure that the religious freedoms of all Egyptians are fully protected in law.

•(1405)

[Translation]

QUEBEC STUDENT FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on November 12, 2011, I had the pleasure of attending the 36th annual Bol d'or, a major high school and college football event that was held in Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles for the very first time.

First of all, congratulations to the winners of the championship: the Collège Notre-Dame Cactus, the Collège François-Xavier Garneau Elans, the Campus Notre-Dame-de-Foy Notre-Dames—winning the first Bol d'or in the school's history—and the Collège André-Grasset Phénix. You are all true champions and should be proud of your achievements.

This major football event was organized by the Cégep Limoilou, the Collège Saint-Jean-Eudes and the Réseau du sport étudiant du Québec.

I would like to sincerely thank the event organizers and volunteers and all the young athletes who helped make this day a true success, to the delight of football fans across the Quebec City region.

Statements by Members

[English]

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week I got to take in the opening of the annual deer hunt. I hunted with two of my sons, my father, as well as some of my brothers, nephews and friends. One of my brothers who lives in England even flew home for the annual ritual. That is how much hunting means to my family and to a lot of people in my riding.

My mom's four brothers, some in their eighties, along with some of their sons and grandsons, made the annual trek up the Bruce Peninsula to hunt deer near their childhood home. Just days before, my 12-year-old cousin, Hunter Unger of Millarville, Alberta, bagged his first deer, a buck. He trained to hunt safely under the watchful eye of his father Dave, just as my sons and nephews did.

In the 1990s the Liberals tried to make criminals out of us and tried to make us feel guilty because we loved to hunt. They tried to destroy our heritage right to hunt. What the Liberals take away, the Conservatives give back.

The best Christmas present hunters, sport shooters and farmers could receive this year is the abolishment of the long run registry. Merry Christmas, Allan Rock.

STATUS OF WOMEN

Mrs. Susan Truppe (London North Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in the House to express my support for a women's group in my riding. Today I am wearing purple along with members from both sides of the House in support of the London Abused Women's Centre's Shine the Light on Woman Abuse Campaign.

Since its inception in November 2010, the goal of this campaign has been to raise awareness around the issue of woman abuse and its effect on society. Organizations, schools, neighbourhoods and places of worship across London will be asked to participate by wearing purple today.

As parliamentary secretary for Status of Women Canada, I am proud that our government has increased funding for women to its highest level ever. We are working hard with women across the country to end violence against women and girls.

Since 2007, Status of Women Canada has approved more than \$30.4 million in funding for projects to end violence against women and girls. Further, the Government of Canada contributed \$1 million to provide women escaping violence with better access to higher quality services at women's shelters.

Statements by Members

I would like to congratulate the London Abused Women's Centre, especially executive director, Megan Walker, for shining the light on woman abuse.

* * *

[Translation]

LOUIS TAILLEFER

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be speaking in the House today to congratulate one of my constituents, who has received a great honour.

Louis Taillefer, a world-renowned specialist in quantum materials and superconductors, was recently awarded the Order of Canada.

A physics professor at the Université de Sherbrooke, Mr. Taillefer describes himself first and foremost as a passionate researcher. His work and discoveries in this field have been highlighted more than once, notably in the most prestigious scientific journal, *Nature*.

Louis Taillefer has received many other honours, including the Marie-Victorin award from the Quebec government and the Premier's Research Excellence Award from the Ontario government. In addition, the Canadian Association of Physicists awarded him the Brockhouse and Herzberg medals.

I would like to congratulate Mr. Taillefer on his investiture and his excellent work. On behalf of the people of Sherbrooke, I want to thank him for his tremendous contribution to research and innovation in Canada.

* * *

● (1410)

[English]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today our government followed through on a commitment made in the June 2011 Speech from the Throne by introducing the Canada-Jordan Economic growth and prosperity act and the Canada-Panama economic growth and prosperity act.

These pieces of legislation, on which our former colleague Stock Day worked so hard, are a key part of Canada's ambitious pro-trade plan that is opening new markets and creating opportunities for Canadian business and jobs for Canadian workers.

We will eliminate tariffs on the vast majority of Canadian exports to Jordan, directly benefiting Canadian exporters and workers. We will also eliminate tariffs to Panama on over 99% of Canadian non-agricultural exports through duty-free access to that market.

Our Conservative government will continue to implement our job-creating, pro-trade plan because we know that through deepened trade we are strengthening the financial security of Canadians by creating new jobs and promoting economic growth.

* * *

CANADIAN AUTO WORKERS LOCAL 195

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the 75th anniversary of

CAW Local 195. This local is a pioneer of the union movement in Canada as the first chartered auto worker union. Today 195 includes over 70 different bargaining units and approximately 7,000 members.

Since its inception, local 195 has been at the forefront of the struggle for unity, progress and justice for workers in Canada. Its history is one of securing meaningful victories on pensions, wages, health and safety in the workplace, issues that still represent central aspects of its continuing work.

Local 195 is also a tremendous community partner supporting important local charities and service organizations like the United Way, the Canadian Cancer Society and the Unemployed Help Centre. Local 195's legacy of giving back is impressive.

I want to commend Gerry Farnham, president, for his extraordinary leadership and thank every member of local 195 for their ongoing commitment to improving our community. Local 195 first and foremost.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, two NDP MPs are in Washington, D.C. today, undermining the Canadian economy and attacking good jobs in Canada. That is just wrong.

Canadians gave our Conservative government a strong mandate to stay focused on what matters to Canadians: jobs and economic growth. As we have consistently said, the Keystone XL pipeline will create thousands of jobs and billions of dollars in economic growth on both sides of the Canada-U.S. border.

The NDP opposes creating jobs and is attacking Canada abroad. New Democrats chose to side with a small group of radical environmental activists protesting against our energy resources. They are too willing to abandon Canada's interests and sacrifice over 622,000 jobs in the process across Canada.

The oil sands are a proven strategic resource for Canada that creates jobs and economic opportunity for Canadians in all provinces and regions of our great country. Undermining the economy and attacking Canadian jobs are yet more worrying examples that the ineffective and disunited NDP is unfit to govern Canada.

* * *

CAPE BRETON ISLAND

Hon. Mark Eying (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the House and most Canadians know that Cape Breton Island is a special place. Now the wonderful island has been chosen number one in North America and number three in the world by *Travel & Leisure* magazine. The island has won this prestigious award because of its beauty, culture and hospitality.

Celtic Colours is one event that showcases these qualities. It attracts over 20,000 visitors from 21 countries around the world. Celtic Colours International Festival is a nine day event that presents the finest of local and international Celtic artists.

One of our most famous visitors, the late Alexander Graham Bell, stated:

I have travelled the globe. I have seen the Canadian and American Rockies, the Andes and the Alps and the highlands of Scotland, but for simple beauty, Cape Breton outrivals them all.

I rise today to recognize all the attendees and volunteers who have made this year's Celtic Colours and the island such a special place.

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NATURAL RESOURCES

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today the NDP is in Washington attacking Canadian jobs and undermining the economy. This is on the heels of NDP president and leadership contestant Brian Topp reaffirming his call for a moratorium on oil sands development. It is clear where New Democrats stand. They actively oppose creating jobs and are happy to attack Canada when they travel abroad.

The Keystone XL pipeline will create thousands of jobs and billions in economic growth on both sides of the border. The NDP chooses to side with a small group of anti-Canadian radical protestors and is willing to sacrifice over 622,000 jobs across Canada.

Our government will continue to promote Canada and the oil sands as a stable, secure, reliable and ethical source of energy for the world. Undermining the economy and attacking Canadian jobs are yet more worrying examples that the ineffective, disunited NDP is unfit to govern.

* * *

• (1415)

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the number one priority for Canadian families is jobs and that out-of-touch government is failing these families badly. Last month we learned that in a single month 72,000 full-time jobs vanished under Conservative mismanagement, 72,000 families lost a breadwinner.

The finance minister's only plan? On January 1, he will give more corporate tax cuts to his friends in the banks and oil companies. That is not something Canadian families can take to the bank. The government does not understand why time and time again New Democrats have voted against the Conservatives blindly handing over billions to already profitable banks, big polluters and large corporations, with no guarantee that a single job be created.

Let me tell the Conservatives why. It is because for another 72,000 families last month it is a failed plan by an out-of-touch government. The NDP has its priorities right and we will continue to press for real action on jobs and other economic measures that will help middle class and poorer Canadian families because we stand with ordinary Canadian families.

* * *

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadian Wheat Board Chairman Allen Oberg has brought his travelling road

Oral Questions

show to Ottawa in an effort to silence and deny marketing freedom to western grain farmers.

Mr. Oberg and his directors, aided by opposition MPs, gathered on Parliament Hill today to steamroll those farmers who want freedom. He is doing a great disservice to the farmers he claims to represent by wasting farmers' money on breakfast for the NDP caucus and an unnecessary expensive survey. This is in addition to the \$1.4 million being spent on baseless, self-serving ad campaigns and \$100,000 wasted on a reckless lawsuit in an attempt to keep their outdated monopoly.

How much more of farmers' money are they willing to risk by wasting time and refusing to work with us in the best interests of farmers? Not only does Parliament have the right to change legislation, our government has the responsibility to deliver on the promises we made to Canadians.

Mr. Oberg and the opposition parties are choosing to punish farmers based on their province of residence. It is time they stop steamrolling farmers and let them market their own grain.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mrs. Nycote Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's about-face on the trans-Pacific partnership took many by surprise. Yesterday, the government said that it was entering these trade negotiations with the intention of protecting our interests, including the supply management system. We now know that Canada was not welcome at the talks precisely because of our supply management system. Something is not quite right.

What changed?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada's position is always that we will protect and promote all our sectors—including our supply management system—in free trade negotiations throughout the world. However, this government's position and our interests are always better protected when Canada is sitting at the table. The other partners have now indicated that they wish to have Canada participate, and we intend to do so.

Mrs. Nycote Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we do not have anything against the idea of developing new markets and we understand the importance of the Asia-Pacific zone. That is not the issue. Dairy, egg and poultry farmers are worried. They have seen the Conservatives' contempt for their colleagues in western Canada and the Canadian Wheat Board.

What guarantees is the Prime Minister willing to give that the supply management system will not, under any circumstances, and I mean any circumstances, be sacrificed for the sake of the trans-Pacific partnership?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, this government's position in favour of supply management is well known. However, what the Leader of the Opposition said is completely untrue. She said that she was in favour of free trade agreements when the NDP opposed every free trade measure, whatever it happened to be. The NDP is even opposed to our free trade agreement with the United States. This government is the only party that promotes increasing our international trade.

● (1420)

[English]

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister should simply say that supply management is off the table. That is what he should say, but supply management is on the table. That is why Canada was allowed in, is it not?

No wonder dairy and poultry farmers are worried. First, the government attacked wheat farmers. Next, dairy and poultry farmers will be out of luck.

Is supply management on the table, yes or no?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government's position in favour of supply management is very well known by producers. It is always our intention when we go to the table to ensure we produce, we protect and we promote the interests of all Canadian sectors, including supply management. That is the position we have taken in all negotiations so far, including negotiations with the European Union, that the provinces, including Quebec, are a party to. We will continue to advance Canadian interests in spite of the knee-jerk opposition of the NDP to any free trade agreement, even to trade with the United States.

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, prairie farmers trusted the government when it promised it would not dismantle the Wheat Board without a democratic vote of farmers. The Conservatives have turned their backs on prairie farmers and denied them the right to vote.

Now the government is asking dairy and poultry farmers to put all their eggs in the Conservatives' basket and just trust them in trade negotiations.

How can farmers possibly trust the government to stand up for supply management after it sold out prairie farmers?

Hon. Ed Fast (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government will continue to defend and promote Canada's interests in every sector of our economy, including our supply management system.

It is obvious the member has not been following recent developments. On Saturday, the current TPP members issued the long-awaited framework agreement under which negotiations will take place. After a review, we determined that Canada can meet and even exceed the level of ambition called for without in any way compromising Canada's ability to stand up for the supply managed sector.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Quebec's dairy farmers and poultry farmers know full well that a number of participants in the trans-Pacific partnership forum,

including the United States, want to see our supply management system disappear. Just last week, the minister responsible said that it was not in Canada's interest to take part in these negotiations and now, all of a sudden, he is changing his tune.

How can we trust a government that prefers to listen to the demands of lobbyists—instead of defending the interests of Canadian farmers—and turns a deaf ear to the demands of Quebec?

[English]

Hon. Ed Fast (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, this past Saturday the partners of the TPP issued their framework agreement. We reviewed it carefully and determined that it is in Canada's best interests to join those negotiations. I can assure the member that we will continue to stand up for the interests of farmers and that we will defend Canada's system of supply management.

* * *

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, facing a steamroller of Conservative abuse, prairie grain farmers stood on Parliament Hill today to plead for democratic producer control over the Canadian Wheat Board. One strong reason for such control is to ensure that farmers properly get the money that their grain earns in the marketplace. Will the government confirm that at least \$100 million of Wheat Board money that should be distributed to farmers instead is being diverted to force farmers to pay for the destruction of the single desk? Will the government confirm that misappropriation of funds?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the only misappropriation is by the Wheat Board itself in taking farmers' money to run a campaign against farmers' own expressed views. Western Canadian farmers have been very clear that they want dual marketing, that they want the voluntary option of the Canadian Wheat Board. That is why this government was elected by prairie farmers, and that is how we are proceeding.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, no one accepts the premise of that answer.

[Translation]

The Conservatives told the United States and other Pacific countries that Canada is prepared to give up its supply management system in agriculture. Nonetheless, in this House, the Conservatives maintain precisely the opposite. Both statements cannot be true.

Oral Questions

Is the government not telling the truth to our trade partners, or is it not telling the truth to our farmers? Which is it?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway has already answered that question. The reality is that we have seen the terms of the negotiations for the trans-Pacific partnership and they allow us to defend and promote all of our interests, including supply management.

This government is always seeking to increase our international trade by promoting all our sectors in international free trade negotiations.

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that answer simply means he is getting ready to slash the tariffs.

Trade failures abound with the government. It wants so badly to surrender control of Canada's perimeter to the Americans but it is getting nothing back: no pipeline; no relief from buy America rules; U.S. entry fees imposed; marine taxes threatened; Canadian taxpayers attacked by the U.S. IRS; country of origin labelling still a problem; softwood lumber still a problem; nothing back for killing the Canadian Wheat Board; no market access guarantees.

Are the Conservatives going to concede a perimeter deal with all this aggravation continuing?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not accept much of the premise of that question including, for instance, the buy America provisions. They have gone nowhere in the U.S. Congress. The fact of the matter is the Liberal Party, when it is in opposition, always opposes our relationship with the United States. That is not in the interests of this country. We have important negotiations going on with the United States on perimeter security and regulatory co-operation. Of course, we will not get everything we want, but that does not mean we will not continue to dialogue with our American friends and ensure we protect and advance Canadian interests.

* * *

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the F-35 procurement process has become a real joke. That aircraft is so expensive and so full of flaws that, except for Canada, no one wants to buy it. The U.S. Secretary of Defense, Leon Panetta, even said yesterday that the Americans might withdraw from the program. Only one person still believes in the future of that aircraft: the Minister of National Defence.

When will he finally open his eyes and realize that Canada is being ripped off?

[English]

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government and our closest military allies understand the importance of this program to the protection of our sovereignty.

Canada is not the only country among our closest allies warning critics of the damage their reckless plans would cause to the military and aerospace workers. I am pleased that Defense Secretary Panetta is taking similar action to warn Congress of the reckless shortsighted implications such proposals would incur.

If the opposition had its way, it would cancel the equipment our air force needs and would put some 80,000 Canadians out of work.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): We know that our CF-18s need to be replaced by 2018 or 2019. Last week, the Associate Minister of National Defence said that Canada was part of the crusade for the F-35s. Why is the minister stubbornly pursuing his crusade for a program that has been bound to fail from the beginning? Why is the minister stubbornly pursuing this crusade when all the other countries, including the United States, are backing out? Why will the minister listen only to Lockheed Martin's promises and why does he not have a plan B?

[English]

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the only crusade is the crusade to malign a very important asset for our young men and women who actually use the equipment, and also to maintain our Canadian sovereignty, as well as to create jobs.

The member opposite is stuck in a time warp of useless rhetoric, misinformation and misrepresentation about the benefits to Canada of the F-35 program.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the U.S. defense secretary now says that because of ballooning costs, it may be time for the U.S. to hit the eject button on the F-35 deal. Israel, Australia, Turkey and Norway are still reconsidering their purchases. So much for the minister's repeated claim that our allies are united and with us on the F-35s.

The government is out of touch. The minister is out of the loop. Canadians are out of patience. Will the government finally put this contract out to public tender?

• (1430)

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is wrong.

F-35s are coming off the production line. Pilots are flying the jets. Sixty-five Canadian industries are benefiting from the program. Jobs are being created. Our men and women will eventually get the equipment they need to do the job that we require them to do.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is clear to everyone that the Conservatives have blown this file totally.

Oral Questions

The F-35 price tag balloons every time another country drops its order. With the Americans now talking about also pulling the plug, the death knell is ringing louder and louder for the F-35s.

When will the minister finally admit the F-35s are an untended procurement boondoggle in the making? I ask the minister again, when will the government put this contract out to tender?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there was a tendering process. It may not be something the hon. member across would accept.

I am pleased to remind the member opposite that the acquisition of the F-35 represents our government's commitment to ensuring Canadian sovereignty while producing the kind of equipment that our men and women need to do their jobs effectively and to achieve mission success.

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FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, police chiefs across the country want to keep the gun registry data for reasons of public safety. Victims of crime want to keep the gun registry to protect public safety.

Now we hear the Conservatives have buried their own report that says abolishing the registry will weaken border controls and facilitate gun trafficking throughout Canada.

Why is the government endangering public safety by opening the floodgates for arms smuggling and proliferation of weapons across Canada?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is rich coming from a member who voted against increasing penalties for those who imported firearms into this country illegally.

In respect of the analysis presented by the officials, it is misleading. It is flawed. Contrary to the suggestion made in the analysis, neither Bill C-19 nor the previous Bill C-391 remove any controls on the import of firearms.

Canadians gave our government a strong mandate to end the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry once and for all, and that is exactly what we are doing.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we actually voted for that bill.

Just yesterday the Minister of Public Safety invited New Democrats to "work together and actually help police officers". We New Democrats think that is a great idea. Police chiefs have said they want to keep the gun registry data, and they want to keep firearms from flowing across the country.

Will the minister stop dividing Canadians and work alongside New Democrats to actually help police officers fix the gun registry and keep this valuable data?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has introduced legislation to scrap the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry once and for all.

Our legislation will destroy the records which are inaccurate and unreliable, and becoming increasingly so over time. If given the

chance, the opposition would once again use the data in order to target law-abiding citizens, when in fact what it should be doing is helping us target criminals.

[Translation]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what we do not understand is why a senior official in the public safety department is saying that abolishing the firearms registry could lead to increased smuggling of illegal weapons across the Canadian border. This specialist is also saying that eliminating the registry will dangerously hinder the work of police officers when it comes to tracing firearms.

The government says it wants to fight serious crime, but considering the action it is taking, anyone can quickly see that it is not walking the talk. The Conservatives' approach is completely illogical.

Will this government listen to the provinces, police chiefs, victims and, now, its own advisors for once?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated at committee earlier this morning, the analysis presented by this official is misleading. It is flawed. Contrary to the suggestion made in the analysis, neither Bill C-19 nor the prior bill removed any controls on the import of firearms.

The member is deliberately trying to paint a different picture than is actually true.

* * *

[Translation]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a confidential inspection report from 2010 shows that a number of sections of the Champlain Bridge are in mediocre condition, are deteriorating rapidly or must be replaced right away. Entire structures need to be rebuilt in 2012-13. The more time goes by, the more urgent the repairs become in order to ensure the safety of motorists.

Can the government tell us if it has an action plan to ensure the safety of the people using the bridge?

• (1435)

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as usual, our government is working based on plans, analyses and results. The hon. member is asking us about our plan for the Champlain Bridge. We have invested \$380 million in this infrastructure. Does he think that we would have done that without a plan? Come on.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is all very well and good to repair the bridge but, at this rate, it will be entirely rebuilt instead of a new one being built.

[English]

The government kept secret a report indicating that there are real risks that the bridge may collapse. Workers and their families who use the bridge every day should not have to worry whether it will collapse right under them.

If we need to close the bridge, will the minister tell Montrealers what they are supposed to do until the new bridge is built?

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, playing politics at the expense of the people of the greater Montreal area is not really our style. Just yesterday at lunchtime, I was working with the mayors of Montreal, Longueuil and Brossard. Together, we are continuing to work to ensure that the Champlain Bridge is safe and that traffic is flowing smoothly.

While this member wants to scare the public, we are doing the work and making sure things get done. Not only are we making sure that the existing bridge is safe, we are also going to build a new one.

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that this government is often surprised by the decisions made by the American government. So I would like to inform the government that the American Secretary of Defense, Leon Panetta, just spoke with American Senator McCain, to inform him that the F-35 program is at risk, meaning that the price of the F-35s will be increasing yet again.

I want to ask the government if there is a Plan B. Is this government ready to launch a tendering process and a competition that would allow us to save money?

[English]

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there was a competition between the F-35 and another aircraft. The F-35 won the bid and as I understand it directly from the U.S. authorities, there is no intention at this point in time to pull out from anything. The F-35s are coming off the production line. Pilots are flying them. They are being delivered through the international partners and our program is on track.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there was neither competition nor bids. U.S. Secretary of Defence Panetta told Senators McCain and Graham that the F-35 program is too rich for the Pentagon's budget and may be either cancelled or reduced severely.

The U.S. secretary of defence gets it. The U.S. navy gets it. The Australian military gets it.

What is it about this minister that does not get it? When the program is cancelled, what is plan b?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are confident that the F-35 program is exactly the kind of resource Canada needs today and well into the future. We are committed to ensuring that our men and women

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receive the best equipment they need to do their work and do it safely.

At the very same time, we are concerned as well about the rhetoric we hear that is misinformation, miscommunication and misinterpretation of what Mr. Panetta said.

WATER MANAGEMENT

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada's drinking water report card says the government is failing in almost every aspect of water protection.

Only marginal improvements have been made to municipal water treatment since the government was first elected, an area where we should be investing to help cash-strapped municipalities.

The report card also gave the government an F for its management of water within its jurisdiction, including first nations reserves and national parks.

Does the lack of a national water strategy explain the government's dismal failure in water management? If not, then what does?

• (1440)

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is working with first nations in respect of water and waste water, building on our water action plan.

We released the results of the national assessment of water and waste water systems in first nations communities in July. We are working with first nations to improve and expand operator and manager training and compliance.

We will be reintroducing first nations water legislation soon to create endor sable standards and guide investments. We are getting the job done.

[Translation]

PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY TO THE PRIME MINISTER

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, according to the parliamentary law clerk, the member for Peterborough broke the law by asking for documents from the CBC. That same week, the Conservatives pleaded guilty to the in and out scandal.

Does this member's interference in the legal progress not prove that the member does as he pleases, or is this a more general abuse of procedure on the part of the Conservatives?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): It is neither, Mr. Speaker. The member for Peterborough was mandated by his constituents to ensure that the CBC is accountable.

[English]

We on this side of the House applaud the member for Peterborough for his hard work on behalf of taxpayers.

Oral Questions

He was elected, re-elected, and elected again to stand up for taxpayers and to ensure that money is being spent appropriately by the CBC. He is doing his work and we applaud him for doing so.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister does not seem to mind being a mascot on captain Peterborough's ship of fools, but this is not about applauding someone who is undermining the public broadcaster. This is about a member whose behaviour, according to legal experts, is invalid, unenforceable and unlawful. The law clerk's message is really clear.

Is the government about carrying out a kangaroo attack against the CBC or does it respect the independence of the courts, and will it respect the letter from the parliamentary legal counsel?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the integrity of the member for Peterborough on this issue and standing up for taxpayers cannot be challenged by the member opposite who campaigned time and again to vote against the long gun registry, stood in his place and betrayed his constituents.

The member for Peterborough campaigned on and asked for a mandate to come to Ottawa and fight for taxpayers. He kept his word.

This member asked for a mandate to come to Ottawa and defeat the long gun registry, and he betrayed his constituents.

I will stand by the member for Peterborough every single day of the week.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Keystone XL will send thousands of Canadian jobs across the U.S. border and substantially increase oil sands emissions. It will lock us into the export of bitumen for decades. Yet, the government only listens to its oil lobbyist friends.

President Obama decided this pipeline needs more public input and study. When will the Conservatives stop blindly backing risky pipelines and instead commit to an energy strategy that puts Canadian jobs and the environment first?

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was appalled to hear that NDP members are actually going to the U.S. to advocate against Keystone. They are flying to our largest trading partner to denigrate a project that employs hundreds of thousands of Canadians, generates billions of dollars of economic activity, and funds social services like education for our children and health care for our elderly. It is a disgrace.

[Translation]

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the U.S. State Department has good cause to delay the decision on the Keystone XL project. There are concerns about climate change. It is obvious that the rest of the world gives little credence to this government's public relations efforts concerning the oil sands. Without regulations, our environment is being polluted and our trade relations are suffering.

When will this government realize that it takes more than an ethical oil label to hide its failure to protect our environment?

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since being appointed as Minister of Natural Resources, I have travelled to Europe, Asia and the United States to defend our interests and to support Canada's jobs and economy.

When the NDP travels abroad, its agenda is to campaign against Canadian industry, which employs hundreds of thousands of Canadians. It is probably the most bizarre international relations strategy I have ever seen, and it proves that the NDP is not fit to govern the country.

• (1445)

[English]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Ed Holder (London West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today the Minister of International Trade tabled both the Canada-Jordan economic growth and prosperity act, as well as the Canada-Panama economic growth and prosperity act. These pieces of legislation are a key part of our government's ambitious pro-trade plan that is opening new markets for Canadian products and services.

More importantly, it would create opportunities for Canadian businesses and create jobs for Canadian workers. Quick passage of this legislation means more jobs in London, Ontario and more jobs across Canada.

Would the minister please explain to the House why these pieces of legislation are critical to creating economic growth and prosperity in Canada?

Hon. Ed Fast (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member. He works very hard for the businesses—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Ed Fast: Mr. Speaker, free trade agreements with Jordan and Panama are a key part of our job creating, pro-trade plan. I was proud to table this important legislation this morning.

Despite the NDP's ideological opposition to trade, our government will continue to pursue our pro-trade plan because open markets create new opportunities for our farmers and small businesses—

The Speaker: Order. I am afraid all that applause ate up quite a bit of the minister's time.

The hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan.

SERVICE CANADA

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government finally found a way to improve service scores: it changed the rules. The government is directing employees to not even mention the Service Canada hotline to clients.

The fact is that Canadians contacting Service Canada are facing unacceptable delays and the government is refusing to address the problem.

When will the Conservatives reverse their plan to cut more employees at Service Canada?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the facts are exactly the opposite to what the hon. member has just said. We are working to improve our services to Canadians at Service Canada.

We are automating both the call systems and the EI processing systems, so that Canadians can access the benefits that they need more efficiently, more effectively and in a more affordable manner. We are automating things so that will happen.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister has simply automated her talking points.

The reality is that service automation is already happening and it is clearly not the answer. The minister should face reality and acknowledge that Canadians deserve better service.

A new report by Roy Romanow recommends increasing accessibility and standardizing eligibility for EI programs. For too many, after paying for years, help is not there when they need it. The government is failing on access to employment insurance.

Will it commit today to fix it?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during the recent global recession we took significant steps to help the unemployed. We brought in an extra five weeks of benefits for all. We made it possible for people to access more training so they could get new jobs. We brought in a whole range of initiatives to help the unemployed get back to work. We also brought in extra people to make sure that their applications were processed quickly and efficiently.

Sadly, despite the protestations to try to help the unemployed, the NDP voted against every single one of those initiatives.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Patry (Jonquière—Alma, NDP): Mr. Speaker, time is passing but the Minister's words never change. Since July, she has been feeding us the same lines, even though reality tells us the opposite of what she says. The NDP has already disclosed figures that the government wants to keep hidden: thousands of Canadians hang up without speaking to an agent. By eliminating further positions, the government is asking Service Canada to do more with less.

Why is the government abandoning working people and their families?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are trying to help the

unemployed get back into the labour market. We have offered them training to prepare them for the jobs of today and tomorrow. Unfortunately, all the NDP does is try to make it easier for them to get employment insurance, not to access the labour market. It wants to have a 45-day work year, but that is not possible. We want to help the unemployed get back to work.

● (1450)

Mr. Claude Patry (Jonquière—Alma, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister can keep saying the same thing all she wants, but the system is not working any more and the public are the ones penalized by the government's failure to act. Service Canada does not answer all its calls. It already takes too long to receive benefits. What will it be like if more employees lose their jobs at Service Canada?

Why is the government refusing to see reality? Why are families going to pay the price of the cuts at Service Canada?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we want to help people get employment insurance benefits. The best way to help them is to give them training to prepare them for the jobs of today and tomorrow. Then they will be able to support their families. That is the best way to help them.

J * * *

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy predicts that climate change will cost Canadians up to \$43 billion by 2050. The government's own advisory panel found that catastrophic climate change could wipe out up to 25% of Canada's GDP.

Right now, the government has no plan to meet 75% of its greenhouse gas reduction targets. As we lead up to the world conference in Durban, when will Canadians get a real plan?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is indeed balancing the need for a cleaner and healthier environment with protecting jobs and economic growth.

The Kyoto protocol does not include major emitters such as China, India or even the United States and therefore does not work. Canada will not sign on to any new agreement that does not include all major emitters.

We remain committed to reducing Canada's greenhouse gas emissions by 17% below 2005 levels and we are achieving that goal.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]*

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the international community has been working for 15 years to find practical solutions to combat climate change, which is the greatest challenge of our day. Protecting forests, green technologies, financial mechanisms for the less wealthy countries and accountability for outcomes are central to the UN process.

Why is this government going to sabotage 15 years of work by egotistically refusing to live up to its responsibilities?

[English]

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the reality is, our Canadian delegation has been preparing for the 17th conference of the parties in Durban all year.

In pre-Durban meetings in Mexico City, Washington and Cape Town, I have assured other national delegations that, despite some significant challenges, I believe we can move our common climate change cause forward in terms of both mitigation and adaptation.

At the same time, I have reiterated our government's decision to not make a second Kyoto protocol commitment but to work to create a new post-Kyoto agreement—

The Speaker: The hon. member for London—Fanshawe.

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ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of National Defence said that the matter of sexual harassment in the RCMP would have to wait until a new commissioner is named. For the brave women who devoted decades of service to the Mounties and were sexually harassed by their peers and superiors, being told “Now, now, have patience” is an intolerable insult.

Will the government pledge to end this systemic violence not in months, not in years, but now?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am extremely concerned about these troubling reports. We expect all members of the RCMP to carry out their duties with integrity and professionalism. Our government is committed to providing all men and women in the RCMP with a workplace free of harassment.

I will be raising this issue with the new commissioner very shortly.

● (1455)

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, how can we believe that the Conservatives take this important issue seriously when they are asking these women to wait?

They did not ask for more time before they attacked the firearms registry, the Canadian Wheat Board or pay equity.

This government says it is tough on crime, but when the time comes to act it says to be patient.

Can the minister give us assurances that he will not wait for a new commissioner to be appointed before taking the action that is needed to help these women?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is concerned about not only the women in the RCMP but also about the men who serve in the RCMP.

I am glad to hear that the member opposite has developed a new-found interest in the RCMP given that the member's party has consistently voted against giving the RCMP, indeed all police officers, the tools they need to do their job.

I want to call on the NDP not only to speak out against harassment, but also to speak out in favour of tools that will ensure that we target criminals.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are concerned about crime and they gave us a strong mandate to keep our streets and communities safe.

One key promise during the election was to establish new lawful access proposals. This is an important measure to ensure the police have the tools they need to do their job.

Could the Minister of Public Safety please update the House on the progress of keeping that commitment?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his hard work on this matter.

We are proposing measures to bring laws into the 21st century and give police the tools they need to do their job. In fact, even Mark Holland, the former Liberal public safety critic, said he supported these important measures. However, the new third party has shown it is so out of touch that it now opposes new tools for police.

I would call on the Liberals to finally stop putting the rights of child pornographers and organized crime ahead of the rights of law-abiding citizens.

* * *

SENIORS

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our seniors saw millions in hard-earned savings wiped out when the Conservatives broke their word and taxed income trusts several years ago. Now the government is sticking it to them again.

Seniors born in 1940 must convert their RRSPs into RRIFs this year, but the bottom has fallen out of the market so their RRSPs have lost value and some have incurred substantial losses.

Will the minister allow them to wait to convert their RRSPs so they can at least try to rebuild their value?

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is nice to hear that the opposition actually understands some of the challenges that our seniors face.

We did extend that deadline for seniors during the recession but if I recall, all of the opposition voted against that at the time. It matters not what we put forward to help seniors, because the opposition tends to vote against it.

We have actually done a great amount to help seniors prepare for their retirement. We encourage the opposition to support some of those measures.

CANADIAN NORTHERN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Comptroller General found that 21 out of 47 contracts awarded by CanNor were sole-sourced and that 17 of the 21 were awarded without justification.

The Comptroller General also found evidence of contract splitting to avoid competition.

The questions are clear. How much was spent when CanNor broke the rules? Who received the money? Who is going to take responsibility for this mishandling?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I stated many times, we accept the recommendations coming from the auditor. We are addressing those recommendations. This was the process audit.

JUSTICE

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is proposing responsible measures to protect families and individuals. The safe streets and communities act would impose tougher sentences on pedophiles, drug dealers and the most violent young offenders. Meanwhile, the opposition wants to treat honest farmers and duck hunters like fugitives, but it opposes tougher sentences for dangerous criminals.

The justice committee has held eight meetings on Bill C-10 and has heard from over 50 witnesses. Yet the opposition parties have begun to filibuster to further delay these important measures.

Can the minister please inform the House about our government's efforts to strengthen Canada's justice system?

● (1500)

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at committee, opposition members are back to their basic philosophy and ideology. They are opposing jail time for serious sexual offenders who prey on our children, drug dealers who set up dangerous meth labs in residential neighbourhoods and arsonists who burn people's homes but yet are eligible to serve their sentences in their own houses.

However, they are going further. They are upset that criminals bringing cocaine and heroin into this country will be facing

mandatory sentences. We disagree with them. They are completely wrong. When are they going to start standing up for victims for a change?

[Translation]

VETERANS

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it seems the budget cuts at the Department of Veterans Affairs are going to be deeper than the minister had given us to believe.

The veterans' hospital at Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue, the last one managed by the federal government, is to be transferred to the Government of Quebec. That will be 1,300 fewer employees in the department, in addition to the 500 positions being eliminated as announced last week.

How can we hope that our veterans will receive the same quality of service if the Department no longer has any employees to deliver it?

Is this how the Conservatives thank the veterans who have served Canada? Is this how they listen to them?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have one priority, and that is to serve veterans, and in particular the veterans at St. Anne's Hospital, who receive exceptional care. That is why we have initiated talks with the Government of Quebec to ensure that our veterans continue to be provided with exceptional services. I have visited that hospital on two occasions—I was there on Saturday—and I observed the professionalism of the staff and their dedication to our veterans.

We are going to ensure that our veterans in St. Anne's Hospital and our 10,000 beds across the country receive first class care.

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government's supplementary estimates propose ideological cuts of more than \$160 million in a dozen departments and agencies. The Parliamentary Budget Officer himself admitted that he is unable to identify all the cuts that have been made and are to come, including \$60 million in the Department of Human Resources and \$7 million in the Economic Development Agency for the Regions of Quebec.

Can the Prime Minister tell us where he is going to slash and guarantee, particularly to the unemployed and businesses in Quebec, that they will not be the ones who suffer from these secret cuts?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are obviously seeking to ensure that every dollar of taxpayer money is spent wisely. We think it is tremendously important that we return to balanced budgets, so that we do not get into the same situation that Greece, Italy and Spain find themselves in. Step by step, we will get it done and protect the core competencies that people depend on, whether it is health care, education or supports for our seniors.

*Government Orders***GOVERNMENT ORDERS***[English]***KEEPING CANADA'S ECONOMY AND JOBS GROWING ACT**

The House resumed consideration of Bill C-13, An Act to implement certain provisions of the 2011 budget as updated on June 6, 2011 and other measures, as reported without amendment from the committee, and of the motions in Group No. 1.

Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP calls for increased stimulus spending and yet it voted against the stimulus package when it was introduced. It is clear what the opposition plan is for Canada. We only need look at Ontario from 1990 to 1995 for a sneak preview. The NDP's failed tax and spend philosophy continues today with demands for more freewheeling deficit spending and higher taxes that would kill jobs.

Budget 2011 is the right plan for the right time. This government has taken all the right steps and we must build on that advantage, the Canadian advantage. While our plan is working, the opposition suggests that we need to raise taxes and increase spending.

I listened with great interest recently to the member for Toronto Centre when he addressed the Economic Club of Canada. I can tell members that we have seen this movie before and it does not end pretty. The member for Toronto Centre wants to take us back to the future. As we all know, when that member became premier of Ontario, he inherited a \$20 billion deficit. When he left office it was \$60 billion. His first budget had a \$670 million shortfall, his second \$1 billion and his third \$1.6 billion. From his time as the NDP premier of Ontario, Canadians know about his government's dreadful economic record: higher debt, higher taxes and higher unemployment. By the time he left office, he had raised taxes for every income bracket. People making more than \$67,000 faced the highest marginal tax rates in North America and the rating agencies had downgraded Ontario's credit worthiness.

This is exactly what we could expect from an NDP government. Clearly, it is not fit to govern. We cannot afford to listen to the opposition, the "nattering nabobs of negativism". We would rather listen to those who have some experience with such matters, such as the IMF, *Forbes*, the World Economic Forum, the OECD, the Economic Intelligence Unit and the G20 Young Entrepreneurs' Alliance, all of whom recognize that Canada possesses something that many countries around the world today consider a precious and rare commodity, stability.

I call on the opposition to do the right thing for Canada and support this budget.

● (1505)

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonaville—Gander—Grand Falls—Windor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the negative nabob caucus, I will ask a question, and God forbid I delve into the world of negativism.

I want to ask about the tax credits that the member has been talking about. When the Conservatives talk about these non-refundable tax credits, they talk about them in the sense that they will benefit all Canadians, when, as our leader, the member for Toronto Centre, the one who the member picked on, quite rightly

pointed out that many of the vulnerable members of our society will not be able to benefit from this credit because it will be non-refundable.

Why can the government not make these non-refundable tax credits to caregivers, firefighters and so forth, refundable? It is a specific question. It is just about that.

Mr. Mark Adler: Mr. Speaker, I am on the finance committee and we had just finished pre-budget consultations and we travelled across the country. From firefighters to child care providers to business groups, they all supported our government's economic action plan to create jobs with a low tax plan.

It is clear that the member's party is totally out of touch. The speech that his leader gave last week would clearly taking us back to the future. The people of Ontario have the dreaded experience of living under that kind of leadership once and he wants to bring to Canada what he brought to Ontario.

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was also on the finance committee with the member and it is not true that everyone agreed that the way the government was going forward was the right way. The proposed tax credits would not benefit everyone. They would not benefit people who do not have enough money to actually benefit from a tax credit. Many people and many organizations ask that the tax credits be made refundable.

Would my hon. colleague just confirm whether he believes that everyone really agrees with what was proposed?

Mr. Mark Adler: Mr. Speaker, my hon. friend has done an absolutely fine job as vice-chair of the finance committee.

On May 2, the people of Canada gave us a very strong mandate. We ran on a plan and the people of Canada accepted that plan and gave us a strong, stable, national Conservative majority government to implement it. Tax credits were part of that whole plan. The people of Canada spoke and gave us the opportunity implement that plan.

● (1510)

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the member a question because we have had so many questions on these tax credits.

We have the workers' tax benefit, often called WITB, introduced by the Minister of Finance. We have also raised the personal exemption multiple times to ensure that lower income people do not pay any tax. We have tried to do the best we can to target those initiatives to lower income people.

There was never a tax credit in previous governments for physical fitness or for the arts and now we are offering that.

Combined with these other benefits, would the member not agree that these cover the whole gamut and that all of our initiatives, collectively, are moving forward, not only to address issues of middle-class families but also of lower income families, with different programs?

Mr. Mark Adler: Mr. Speaker, yes, my hon. friend is absolutely right. We looked at the whole budget in its totality and people. We stand with average Canadian families who have kids or who have grandparents they need to look after and these tax credits would help in that effort.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak against Bill C-13, An Act to implement certain provisions of the 2011 budget as updated on June 6, 2011 and other measures.

This bill does not give us what we need. When the Standing Committee on Finance travelled and heard from witnesses, we saw that this bill is out of touch with reality.

For example, last month, we lost 72,000 jobs. The government continues to say that everything is fine.

This bill came out a long time ago. It does not take into account everything that is going on now. It does not take into account that 1,400,000 people are currently unemployed. If we include people who are discouraged and who have stopped looking for work, that number is nearly 2 million. That is huge.

Yet the government says that everything is fine, that it is carrying on as planned and that it will not make any changes to what it put forward, even though some economists have suggested investing in infrastructure and helping seniors by increasing their pensions. The government is still doing none of that.

Last summer the youth unemployment rate was 17.2%. That is much higher than before the recession, when it was 14%.

Once again, the government is not really looking at the numbers or at reality. It is completely out of touch with reality and with the people. And that is what we are seeing with those who are outraged as well as with the Occupy Montreal and Occupy Ottawa movements. People do not understand why this government is not listening to them. They protest, yet the government is still not listening.

And when it comes to household debt, for every dollar earned, a person owes \$1.49. That is a ratio of 150%. How can the average family find a way out?

And what is the government's solution? It lowers taxes on big business. We have seen that lowering taxes on big business does not help those without an income.

Instead of moving in that direction, the government should listen to certain economists and even the Conference Board of Canada, who are saying that the gap between rich and poor is growing. And we have seen it.

Quebec's consumer protection bureau is also saying that lowering taxes on big business is contributing to this wealth gap. The government is sticking its head in the sand and refusing to budge.

Government Orders

If we look at the OECD figures, economic growth over the past 20 years has benefited the rich more than the poor. Bill C-13 is inadequate.

We want leadership and a vision for the economy. Why not invest in a green economy that is geared toward the future?

We can offer projects and research and development programs that could help Canada get ready for the future, for an economy that will not only bring us wealth and economic growth, but also provide wealth for our children and protect the environment.

The government has nothing for that.

We want concrete results.

To get back to the bill and the amendments we are proposing, the government tends not to want to debate or discuss the issues. We see that in the case of Bill C-10, and as far as Bill C-13 is concerned, everything is mixed together. All sorts of things are combined and we are told to just deal with it.

I sit on the Standing Committee on Finance, and we got an explanation for Bill C-13 while we were on a pre-budget tour. This illustrates the government's bad faith.

• (1515)

In this bill, one part addresses the \$2 per vote subsidy.

[*English*]

Part 18 of the bill would amend the Canada Elections Act to phase out quarterly allowances to registered parties.

[*Translation*]

At a time when the government is completely out of touch with reality and people no longer trust certain politicians—especially on the other side of the House—the government is now eliminating a tool linked to the fact that people vote. It is an important tool. The reason why we are in the House today is because people voted for us. If we do not belong to a big political party, or if we have ideas but not the financial backing, things can be very difficult. We know that those on the other side of the House who stand for election already have a great deal of money because they are in government. They have their friends. There is a lot of payback.

The reason for the \$2 per vote allowance was to prevent big business from funding election campaigns. It was to create a separation and give a voice to the people. This government is doing the opposite.

*Government Orders**[English]*

The \$2 per vote allowance is an important equalizer that gives all parties, regardless of their presence in Parliament, a fair chance at equal participation in a general election and campaign. It is also a tool that rolls back the power of big money in influencing the outcome of elections and the policy agenda. It reflects also the support of voters and increases their motivation to vote. What we are doing right now is going against that. It rewards parties for convincing people to vote for them, therefore ensuring that parties have a message that is meaningful to all voters. It is also a way of facilitating a campaign donation.

The government says that if people have money and believe in the party, then give money to that party. Not everyone has money, but everyone has a right to vote and their vote should count. If people are poor or unable to pay their bills at the end of the month, they do not think of sending contributions to a political party. However, if they go out and vote and they know their vote helps the party, even though it does not win, even though it is not in government or even not sitting in the House, at least people feel it is something they have done and it helps someone else, without having to take the money out of their wallet, if they do not have any, and having to help the party.

Again, the Conservatives are successful in raising money because they are in government, so it is helping their friends and their friends helping them. That is why there is a policy right now. With this budget, the Conservatives are helping the big corporations, which are already profitable, by giving big corporate tax cuts.

There is a lack of understanding of what is happening with the population. There is a disconnect between the government and the population. For people who want their voice to be heard, the government is shutting them down and telling them their vote does not really count.

● (15:20)

[Translation]

One thing is really disturbing. I stood for election in 2008. People told me that they voted for me. It was important to them that their vote count. It was also important to them that this advance democracy in some way. Now, this government is making us take a step backward.

With the votes that I garnered I was able to continue. It helped my party and moved things forward. This bill is anti-democratic for people with new ideas who do not yet have a party. This government's bill is a setback for democracy. For that reason, I will be voting against the bill.

[English]

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member's speech and regrettably he has it wrong. When it comes to the economy, Canada is doing better relative to other nations.

What I found particularly interesting were his comments on the per vote subsidy. People are forced to make this subsidy. The government is getting rid of that subsidy because people should voluntarily choose which party they want to support financially.

The member does not seem to understand that the taxpayers pay for the subsidy, and the taxpayers are all Canadians. Canadians are forced to support parties they do not want to support.

The fact is the Conservative Party will be hit the hardest, because we get the most votes of any party, but we are doing it on principle.

Will the member realize that people should not be paid or go to the ballot box for money reasons? The member has suggested that people vote to get money for a party? People should vote because it is the right thing to do. They should vote because people have made tremendous sacrifice, including with their own lives, so that we have the right to vote. People should vote because they believe in policy issues.

Will the member change his opinion on the per vote subsidy?

[Translation]

Mr. Hoang Mai: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the minister for his question. I disagree with his position that Canada must pay and that, here, this is unfair.

Tax credits for donations to political parties are another way to subsidize.

[English]

It is a subsidy. If the government gives a tax credit for donations, it is the same thing. Canadians are also paying for that.

We are saying it is important for people who do not have money, for the poor, who actually want to contribute and who know that their vote will help the party and the person for whom they vote. That is worth defending. We are saying it is democratic. This helps democracy move forward.

[Translation]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the hon. member for Brossard—La Prairie, whom I would like to thank for his very interesting speech. I also found the \$2 per vote issue very interesting. I think that perhaps the minister of state does not understand the system. In fact, as the member for Brossard—La Prairie said, corporate donations were replaced by a simple public process with funding allocated based on the number of votes at the polls.

[English]

This system is exactly based on the voter choosing where the \$2 goes, whereas the larger amount of tax dollars that the government does not seem to want to touch come from all of us. Whether we like or not, if someone donates \$400 to a political party, we as taxpayers will give them back \$300.

I would like the hon. member's thoughts on how we can persuade the government that it is removing the exact part of the system that works best and is keeping tax dollars going to political parties that are far less democratic.

• (1525)

[Translation]

Mr. Hoang Mai: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her question.

[English]

We are trying to convince the government. We have pushed for an amendment to the bill. We have explained to the government why it is important.

I totally agree with my hon. colleague in terms of the \$2 per vote subsidy helping the party. It is more democratic, it helps in terms of money and it costs less than all the tax credits.

Basically, it is very important for our democracy. It is very important for us who are here and who are elected that the votes we get are translated into something that makes Canada move forward.

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to discuss Bill C-13 and point out that it clearly illustrates how the government is keeping its promise to Canadians.

As we all know, Canadians have weathered some difficult economic times over the last several years. The government has taken unprecedented action to help them through this challenging world environment. Indeed, we are seeing reassuring signs throughout the economy, though the international economy is still fragile.

The next phase of Canada's economic action plan builds on the government's record by announcing new measures for families and additional support for communities. This includes encouraging hiring by providing a temporary hiring credit for small business of up to \$1,000 against a small firm's increase in its 2011 EI premiums, or those paid in 2010. The plan also includes an extension of active or recently terminated work-sharing agreements by up to 16 weeks so companies can avoid layoffs by offering EI benefits to workers willing to work a reduced work week while their company recovers.

Our government is focused on supporting Canadian families with a range of targeted measures that will help Canadians find and hold on to good, high paying jobs, while improving the quality of the lives of Canadians in big and small communities across the country.

Other areas that we are working on include assistance for remote communities that often lack the same level of services as larger centres. Our government is taking measures to address this unfortunate reality. For example, we propose to strengthen the health care in rural communities by supporting family physicians, nurse practitioners and nurses who make the choice to practise in underserved or remote communities. Today's bill proposes to forgive a portion of the federal share of the Canada student loans for new family physicians, nurse practitioners and nurses who practise in underserved rural or remote communities, including communities that provide health services to first nations and Inuit populations.

Starting in 2012-13, practising family physicians will be eligible for federal Canada student loan forgiveness of up to \$8,000 per year to a maximum of \$40,000. Nurse practitioners and nurses will be eligible for federal Canada student loan forgiveness of up to \$4,000 per year to a maximum of \$20,000. By bringing doctors and nurses

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into our rural communities, we are helping all Canadians access essential health services no matter where they live.

The other part of the action plan deals with firefighters. The next phase of Canada's economic action plan recognizes the invaluable contribution that volunteer firefighters make every day to the safety and security of their communities. Specifically, Bill C-13 proposes a volunteer firefighter tax credit, a non-refundable tax credit on an amount of \$3,000, for volunteer firefighters who perform at least 200 hours of service in their communities during the year. This credit will provide up to \$450 in tax relief to eligible firefighters who volunteer in this often thankless task. Eligible volunteer firefighters who currently receive honorariums in respect to their duties as a firefighter will be able to choose between the new tax credit or existing tax exemptions of up to \$1,000 for the honorarium.

The president of the Canadian Volunteer Fire Services Association, Martin Bell, called the tax credit "wonderful news" and said that the tax credit would contribute significantly to the capacity of volunteer fire departments to protect lives and property.

Budget 2011 also keeps our commitments for the future of the gas tax fund.

• (1530)

In 2007 we extended the gas tax fund by four years, delivering \$11.8 billion in gas tax funding from 2007 to 2014 for infrastructure in cities and communities.

In 2008 we committed to making the gas tax fund permanent.

In 2009 we doubled the gas tax fund to \$2 billion a year.

In 2010, despite challenging economic circumstances, we pledged to protect the gas tax fund.

In 2011, this legislation, Bill C-13, contains a permanent annual investment of \$2 billion in municipal infrastructure through the gas tax fund.

The gas tax fund provides predictable, long-term infrastructure funding for municipalities, allowing them to better protect their future infrastructure investments.

Given the current environment, the number one issue for this government is to get people back to work which will help grow our economy.

Temporary measures in support of the economic recovery were included in the economic action plan to reinforce the substantial support the government already provides to job creators. The measures in this bill will build on that momentum, laying the foundation for long-term prosperity by encouraging business investments that are necessary to sustain economic growth. This includes extending the accelerated capital cost allowance treatment for investments, manufacturing, and processing machinery and equipment for two years to support the manufacturing and processing sector.

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As members are aware, providing support for families and communities helps to ensure Canadians benefit from the opportunities and wealth that long-term growth creates no matter where they live.

The government is showing its commitment to help families and communities. It has stood up for all Canadians to help ensure that their needs are addressed through a wide variety of tax reliefs and targeted investments.

Canadians should be proud of how the government has responded to these challenges today. We are far better off today than we were even a few years ago, and we are well-positioned to deal with the issues that are ahead.

Canadians need the skills to participate fully in society and to secure Canada's position as a leader in the global economy. Further action is required and we are taking that action.

Canada is the best country in the world to live. We are living at the best time in human history. We are doing far better than most in the world. The government will ensure that in the future we remain the best country to live. A strong economy is key to that and to the quality of life for Canadians to ensure that every Canadian can reach their full potential as human beings.

May God keep our land glorious and free.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the government member a question.

He keeps telling us that tax credits are important and that there are a number of them. I would like to know what he thinks about the fact that the poorest people in the country will not have access to these tax credits. I would like to know what he would say to them. In fact, they are the ones who need the most help and they are the ones who are unable to take advantage of these tax credits.

What is the government's exact position? Is the government thinking of changing its position? It is quite important to allow these people to have access to tax credits. They would be very useful to these people who really need them.

• (1535)

[English]

Hon. Steven Fletcher: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, this is an area that the NDP has had historic challenges understanding. When we reduce the tax burden on middle-class Canadians, job creators and corporations, that helps grow the economy. It empowers individuals financially and allows them to make the best decisions for themselves.

The less tax that people pay to the government, the more the economy will grow. The faster the economy grows, the strength of that growth helps people in low income situations. It helps the government invest in priority social programs that benefit all Canadians, including those with low incomes. It helps Canadians deal with the socio-economic challenges the member alluded to.

It is important to have a strong economy to protect Canadians and our environment. That is what tax credits do.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to continue with that question.

The Conservatives have, for a while now, talked about how much they care about firefighters. One of the things they wanted to do was to provide this tax credit.

The problem as we see it with the tax credit is that they are being very selective in terms of the volunteer firefighters they are helping. The equipment and the energies, along with the resources that our volunteer firefighters put in is quite significant.

The question is, why would we not be providing some benefit for low income firefighters? The government is doing it for the higher income, why not the lower income? By having a tax credit, the government is not allowing them to have any benefit.

Why is there different treatment for those who are more well off than others?

Hon. Steven Fletcher: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in my remarks, the tax credit has been described by members of the firefighters association as wonderful. They have been very complimentary. It is what volunteer firefighters have asked for.

The previous Liberal government had that opportunity, to bring forward some sort of financial recognition to firefighters. It chose not to. This Conservative government chose to recognize the contribution volunteer firefighters make in our communities.

I would also point out that if the member was serious about the financial recognition for firefighters, he would support this budget instead of voting against it.

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I just want to compliment our minister on his response to that hypocritical question by a member of the Liberal Party.

We met, several times, with volunteer firefighters and with chiefs of fire departments across this country who stated very clearly that they were begging the former Liberal government when it was in power for 13 long years to do something to help them. What did the former Liberal government do? Nothing.

I want to compliment the minister, and I want him to explain how the new family caregiver tax credit will benefit people regardless of whether the Liberal Party or the NDP vote for it.

Hon. Steven Fletcher: Mr. Speaker, I accept with humility the comments from the parliamentary secretary.

It is really the parliamentary secretary who should be praised for her excellent work in pre-budget consultations, and her work as a police officer. This parliamentary secretary knows very well the needs of Canadians right across the board, particularly firefighters and police officers, the very people who keep our communities safe.

I appreciate the question regarding the caregiver tax credit. Caregivers help make our society better, and certainly help individuals and their families. Some financial recognition of that will go a long way to helping families.

Again, I just want to say that the parliamentary secretary has done an outstanding job in pre-budget consultations, and that is why—

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• (1540)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order. Resuming debate, the hon. member for Etobicoke North.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-13, particularly because it affects low income Canadians and fails to address health problems, including chronic cerebrospinal venous insufficiency and rare disorders.

Specifically, Bill C-13 deliberately excludes low income Canadians from programs such as the family caregiver tax credit. If people quit their job to take care of a sick loved one at home, they likely would not qualify for any benefits as the Conservatives have put in place a minimum threshold to qualify. I think it is unconscionable to deliberately exclude the very people who are most in need of help. It important to remember that one of Canadians' most deeply held values is fairness.

How then can Canada be one of the few developed countries without a national student nutrition program? Sadly, one in five Canadian children lives below the poverty line which may lead to poor nutritional status and poor child health outcomes. Canadian children from all income brackets are vulnerable to inadequate nutrition. Many children go to class hungry as 40% of elementary students and 62% of secondary school students do not eat a nutritious breakfast.

Hungry children cannot learn. Their learning capabilities are affected by how recently they have eaten. Malnutrition in early life can limit long-term intellectual development. Moreover, Canadian children and youth experience unprecedented rates of type 2 diabetes and obesity because they do not have the knowledge to make healthy food choices and do not have access to the healthy food they need for health and learning.

The Toronto Foundation for Student Success has more than 600 schools in Toronto, 142,000 children and youth, and 3,000 community volunteers with a total of 20,350,000 meals served annually. Toronto research has found that student nutrition programs reduce absenteeism, suspensions and expulsions by 50%; improve performance on standardized literacy and numeracy tests; dramatically impact credit accumulation in secondary school, which is a key indicator of graduation; create a sense of belonging and improve the morale of schools. Toronto research showed that the health impacts include: increased consumption of fruit, vegetables, whole grain foods, and healthy eating habits which prevents diabetes, high blood pressure and obesity.

Student nutrition programs are needed in aboriginal, remote and rural communities, and the same behavioural learning and health impacts are found in all communities.

Feeding Our Future showed that 78% of grade 10 students, who reported eating morning meals most days, were on track to complete their diploma, meaning they earned 15 or more credits versus 61% who went without food.

The Boston Consulting Group, BCG, has shown that on average each high school graduate contributes an extra \$75,000 annually to the economy. If providing food at school increases graduation rates by just 3%, based on the BCG figures, a national school meal program implemented in Canada's high schools at a cost of just

\$1.25 a day would result in a net payback of more than \$500 million annually.

Outside Canada school meals are viewed as an investment rather than a cost. Improving child and youth nutrition, health and social development feeds regional economic development.

For example, in Brazil food is a constitutional right. A massive national program feeds 47 million students at 190,000 schools each day. Access to nutritionally adequate and safe food is a right of every individual. Therefore, I think it is incumbent upon each of us to fight for a national school nutrition program for all of our children.

• (1545)

I would like to address a second item missing from the budget: funding for clinical trials for chronic cerebrospinal venous insufficiency, or CCSVI.

After much resistance, the federal government announced this summer that it would fund clinical trials for CCSVI. This was welcome news for Canadians with MS and for their families. However, this decision took far too long to arrive at, and, since the announcement, no plan has been provided describing how the government plans to establish these trials.

I want to be very clear: right now, all we have is announcements; what we need is action. Canadians with MS cannot afford to wait, as any delay possibly means more damage.

Mr. Speaker, 30%-50% of MS patients who are untreated worsen by one EDSS score in one year, and 50% with relapsing-remitting MS later develop a progressive form of the disease for which there are no drugs. The reality is that one month can mean the difference between walking and not walking, or between living independently and living in care.

CIHR has recommended a phase I/II clinical trial, which is usually undertaken to assess safety. However, angioplasty is an accepted standard of care practice and routinely used for many conditions. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has accepted the basic safety information for angioplasty, since it has already approved three double-blind phase II clinical trials, which are already being conducted in the United States. There is no need for a phase I trial in Canada. It will waste time and money and would provide nothing beyond what is already known worldwide about this procedure.

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What is needed is an adaptive phase II/III trial, which would permit a rapid and seamless transition from the phase II trial—subject, of course, to interim assessments of safety and efficacy—to a full phase III trial. This approach would still address all the regulatory requirements and answer all the key safety and efficacy questions, but it would also save time and cost.

Moreover, we need experts who are actively engaged in diagnosis and treatment of CCSVI on the CIHR's expert working group.

I would like to address a third omission from the budget.

Some 2.7 million Canadians are affected by rare disorders such as cystic fibrosis, sickle cell disease and thalassemia. Most rare disorders are difficult to diagnose and are chronic, degenerative, progressive and life-threatening.

Families who face rare disorders lack access to scientific knowledge of their disease and to quality health care. They face difficulties and inequities in accessing treatment and care.

Canada is one of the only developed countries without a policy for rare disorders. As a result, Canadian patients are frequently excluded from many clinical trials and often have delayed access to treatment. Moreover, Canadian patients cannot always access drugs available to patients elsewhere. Only a fraction of the drugs approved in Europe and the U.S. are brought to Canada. Going forward, let us all commit to working together to develop a national policy for rare disorders.

I wish there were more time. I wish there were time to address the cuts that have decimated Environment Canada, particularly its adaptation group. Eight were fired in June, and twelve of 17 have received workforce adjustment letters. Many of these scientists share part of the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize for climate change.

Adaptation science is the bridge between climate predictions and practical applications. Why, then, would the minister cut climate impact and adaptation scientists? Does he really think an investment of \$149 million will truly counter the problem? When will the Minister of the Environment restore activities in the Environment Canada adaptation group so that the economic well-being, health and safety of Canadians will be protected?

• (1550)

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member spoke a lot about medical issues, and I know those are close to her heart.

I met recently with officials of the MS Society in my office here in Ottawa. They thanked the government for the family caregiver tax credit and said it was a step in the right direction.

I want to ask my colleague specifically about the enhanced medical expense tax credit, which would remove the \$10,000 limit on the amount of eligible medical expenses that may be claimed on behalf of a financially dependent relative. As a result of her concerns about the medical system, will she vote in favour of the bill, since it would provide an excellent enhanced medical expense tax credit that would benefit thousands of Canadians?

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, at first the hon. member mentioned the family caregiver tax credit, and I will pick up on that.

I represent one of the most diverse ridings in the country. We rank about fifth. Many of my families are newcomers. They face many challenges in coming to Canada. They face the challenge of learning a new language, of adapting to a new culture and particularly of finding a job.

My families often work two to three jobs just to put food on the table for their children. If the choice is between buying a \$5 litre of orange juice and a \$2 double litre of orange pop, the choice is clear to a family trying to stretch each dollar.

The reality is that many of these families will never meet the requirement that the government has put in place to receive that caregiver tax credit.

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have great respect for the member for Etobicoke North. She has a fine brain and a warm heart and she is always worth listening to, so I thank her for her excellent speech.

She talked about two things, children and medicine, things she cares about and knows about, and there is a sense of urgency. She mentioned that time is running out; it is not the eleventh hour, it is the hour.

I wonder if the hon. member is aware of the book *The Spirit Level*, by Wilkinson and Pickett, which uses scientific data to show why the Scandinavian countries and Japan are far ahead of us in health and welfare for children and adults, why the United States is the worst of the developed countries and why we are sliding toward that model. If she has not read it, I recommend it to her, to every Canadian and to every member in the House.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague, for whom I also have great respect.

To bring in the international perspective, and I will do it regarding food, in Sweden children between the ages of six and 16 receive a hot meal each day under laws set by the national food administration. Pupils choose from three entrees, a vegetarian dish and a salad bar with at least five fresh choices. Milk and bread are also served.

In Japan children aged six to 15 receive school meals. A government initiative aims to ensure 50% of the meals are made with local ingredients. The UN world food program and school feeding programs encourage hungry children to attend school.

Feeding these children helps them concentrate on their studies. Food attracts hungry children to school, and an education broadens their options, helping lift them out of poverty.

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Canada has provided \$25 million a year since 2003 in support of the world food program. We need to fight for a national nutrition program here.

[Translation]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her very interesting speech on health, among other things.

Five million Canadians do not have access to a family doctor and 73% of Canadians without a family doctor depend on emergency rooms or walk-in clinics for front-line health care. Canada is ranked 26th out of 30 industrialized countries when it comes to the number of doctors per capita. Could the hon. member tell us about their plan to address this situation?

• (1555)

[English]

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, health care has to be an absolute priority. Going forward, I would like to see a vision for health care in this country coming from the government. In the last few years, government members have hardly uttered the word “health”.

* * *

[Translation]

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before we resume debate, I have the honour to inform the House that a message has been received from the Senate informing this House that the Senate has passed the following bill:

[English]

Bill S-3, A third Act to harmonize federal law with the civil law of Quebec and to amend certain Acts in order to ensure that each language version takes into account the common law and the civil law.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Brandon—Souris.

* * *

KEEPING CANADA'S ECONOMY AND JOBS GROWING ACT

The House resumed consideration of Bill C-13, An Act to implement certain provisions of the 2011 budget as updated on June 6, 2011 and other measures, as reported (without amendment) from the committee, and of the motions in Group No. 1.

Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege and honour for me to stand to speak about the next phase of Canada's economic action plan. When I was preparing my notes for these comments, I could not help but realize that many things have already been done prior to part two of this action plan, and I want to touch on them as I move through my comments.

It is not unknown to anyone in Canada that our government believes in lowering taxes. It believes that leaving more money in the pockets of people who work, raise families, and create and live in and participate in communities is better than having the government take it from them and reinvest it in their communities. Often when governments do that, they tend not to hear or understand the needs of

the communities, and therefore, although the investment was well intentioned, the money is quite often misspent.

It is interesting to note that since 2006 our government has cut taxes 120 times. If it is not a record, it is a darn good average. Canadians are recognizing that and are benefiting from the removal of the tax burdens that were in place before. We have removed over one million low-income families, individuals and seniors, from the tax rolls. These are the same low-income people we hear members opposite talking about and being concerned about. By changing thresholds for offering tax benefits, we have removed that many people from the tax rolls. That is something everyone in Canada should be very proud of.

We have cut personal taxes, consumption taxes, business taxes and excise taxes, and the list goes on. We have reduced personal income tax, we have increased the amount Canadians can earn tax free, we have introduced the landmark tax-free savings account—one of the most important personal savings vehicles since the RRSP—and we continue to reduce the small business tax rate from 12% to 11%. Due to our government's low-tax plan, the average typical Canadian family's tax saving is now over \$3,000.

Where do we go from here? What is the next step, and what are we presenting to Canadians to provide the security they need to continue to invest in their homes, families and communities? We have introduced a new family caregiver tax credit and a new hiring credit for small businesses.

I want to mention one measure in particular, because it has a huge impact on job creation and on opportunities for the future.

We have extended the accelerated capital cost allowance that allows businesses to invest in new technology and industrial benefits for their businesses and create efficiencies not only in production but on the environmental side. Since they will be able to write that off at a faster pace, they will be more interested in making that investment and writing it down as quickly as possible.

In my previous life, those types of investments would sometimes take 20 years to write off, so businesses were always carrying them. Whether they were using it or whether it was obsolete, they still had to show it. This is one area of support that business communities and manufacturers have told us has been tremendous.

We talk about supporting families. This is probably one of the most important issues we deal with. We have introduced a family caregiver tax credit that caregivers of all types of infirm, dependent relatives—including, for the first time, spouses, common-law partners and minor children—can utilize. We have introduced an enhanced medical expense tax credit, removing the \$10,000 limit on the amount of eligible medical expenses that can be claimed on behalf of financially dependent relatives.

We are continuing the eco-energy retrofit program, one of the most successful programs we introduced in previous budgets, and I hope the opposition recognizes it as a milestone. It allows people with lower incomes to find ways to create more efficiencies in their homes by reducing their electricity and heating bills, thus making their homes more efficient and allowing them to have more money in their pockets.

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● (1600)

Another part of the budget that is very important to me and to many of the members is the support that we are offering for seniors. Since 2006 when we became government, we have offered \$2.3 billion in annual tax relief for seniors and pensioners. That equates to removing over 85,000 seniors from the tax rolls. We have introduced pension income splitting so people can split their incomes and pay lower taxes and have more money in their pockets to do the things they want to do, to do the things they saved for and worked all their lives for.

We have increased the age credit by \$2,000. We have doubled the pension income credit to \$2,000. We have increased the amount that guaranteed income supplement recipients can earn through employment without a reduction of their GIS benefits. Where does the next step take us? Where does phase two of this action plan go?

We recognize that Canada's seniors not only helped build and make our country great, but they continue to do so. Part of our new plan is going to enhance the GIS for eligible low income seniors who will receive additional benefits up to \$600 for single seniors and \$840 for couples. That will have an impact for over 680,000 seniors across Canada. These are important numbers because they reflect the number of people who will benefit from this directly. We are doing things to help people move forward.

We have enhanced the new horizons for seniors program. The uptake in this program in my constituency of Brandon—Souris has been phenomenal. Seniors are reaching out to other seniors to create opportunities and learning environments. They are doing things together to create a better and healthier lifestyle. We certainly support that.

I mentioned previously about helping families. Extending the eco-energy retrofit program definitely will help seniors particularly those with a low income. That I have no trouble supporting and I would hope that members opposite would support it too.

One of the great things that has been accomplished by this government is that we established the tax-free savings account. That has been a tremendous benefit to seniors.

We talked about volunteer firefighters. I have heard some of the debate today. Volunteer firefighters play a huge role in our rural communities. They are the people who work in our communities, but at the sound of a bell, they leave their work to go and help a neighbour, friend, relative, anyone in the community. They often put themselves at great risk. They do it for one reason. They do it because of their neighbours and families and the communities in which they live. Nearly 85,000 volunteer firefighters provide their services to protect our lives and property in Canada's urban and rural communities, but rural communities in particular rely on volunteer firefighters and their professionalism.

There are many things I want to touch on, but I will finish by touching on the government's support for farmers. Farmers are the backbone of the country. They have fed the world for many years. In this budget we are introducing a new agricultural innovation initiative of \$50 million to keep us on the cutting edge of agricultural innovations. We talk about strengthening the food safety system which is very important. We have invested \$100 million for new

training and additional science capacity. We are helping producers by extending the accelerated capital cost allowance.

There are many reasons in the budget for everyone to support it. I would ask members to do so. I will be supporting it.

● (1605)

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to comment on the eco-energy retrofit program for homes which my hon. colleague brought up twice in his remarks. There is a problem with it. Let us look at the program from the point of view of small businesses which are in the business of retrofitting homes. These are businesses that are hiring people and there are many of them in my riding. A one-year program is not something that businesses can use for planning, hiring and training.

We put forward a proposal that this program go for five years so that small businesses could take advantage of the supposed stability of the majority government to actually grow their businesses. At the end of five years we could have a viable industry doing energy retrofits for homes and helping people save energy and money.

Is the hon. member disappointed that in this budget bill no thought has been given to having a longer period, say five years, for the eco-energy retrofit program so that small businesses could count on that kind of stability?

Mr. Merv Tweed: Mr. Speaker, if I understand it correctly, the program has been around since 2007. It was introduced by the government at that time in a budget. We have seen the benefits of it. It has worked tremendously well in many parts of the country. Therefore, we thought it was desirable to continue with the program.

Many people benefited from this. Not only did people have the work done, but there was training and job creation in the last four years as well. Those people, particularly young people, were able to stay in their communities and continue in the profession they chose. They are now prepared to face the future.

[Translation]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to get back to the question my colleague asked. I do not think his question was answered, because I have heard the same concerns about the eco-energy retrofit program. The problem is not who created it, when it was created or whether it will be renewed. The problem is that contractors and voters in general do not know whether the program will survive for a year, two years, three, four or even five years. The program would be much more effective if people could be certain that it will be around for more years. This way, contractors and the public could plan renovations over a longer period of time.

I would like to know whether the government member could tell us whether he is satisfied or dissatisfied with the fact that these measures are decided on year by year and whether he thinks they would be more effective if they were more long-term to allow people to plan over a longer period of time.

[English]

Mr. Merv Tweed: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure how more clear I can be. This was introduced in 2007. It is now 2011. The program is continuing to operate. The benefits that we have seen in our communities have been tremendous not only for the people who are utilizing the services, but it has helped keep trained people in those new jobs, particularly in the housing industry. It has been a tremendous boon. We now have accredited professionals in our communities carrying on in the jobs of the future and the opportunities that they present.

● (1610)

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to commend my colleague from Brandon—Souris, which is a rural riding. Obviously, it is one of our fine western ridings.

Would the member comment on how this budget, the next phase of Canada's economic action plan, speaks to the needs of rural Canadians and rural Canada?

Mr. Merv Tweed: Mr. Speaker, as important as it is when we talk about introducing and implementing programs and policies that would impact Canadians, I think we all would recognize there are differences between the rural and remote parts of Canada and the urban parts of Canada and that we have to always be sensitive to those differences.

Many of the things that we have introduced in the budget have been things which the rural caucus has brought forward to the Minister of Finance and to the government, and they have listened to us. That is the most important part. We get things done by working together, by listening to our constituents and, at the end of the day, producing a product that I hope all members will support.

[Translation]

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today to stand up for New Democrats' ideals when it comes to the economy. With Bill C-13, the Conservatives have supported the NDP motion calling for immediate economic action. Unfortunately, however, this bill is very simply not enough.

A lot more has to be done to respond to the legitimate concerns that Canadian families have about the economy. The Canadian public wants to see real action taken to stimulate the economy, create jobs and combat the social inequalities we are facing. And today I would like to stress that last point, because, in my opinion, it is crucial to understand the economic benefits that are produced by a more equal society.

Income inequality is an important indicator of fairness in an economy and has repercussions on other areas, such as crime and social exclusion. A study done by the Conference Board of Canada shows that Canada ranks 12th out of 17 comparable countries when it comes to inequality. In other words, the income gap is wider in Canada than in 11 comparable countries. Although Canada's wealth is distributed more equitably than in the United States, Canada's 12th place ranking suggests that it is doing a mediocre job of guaranteeing income equality, according to the Conference Board.

A significant widening of the income gap occurred in Canada between 2000 and 2006. Canada is the only country in the Conference Board study whose relative score fell between the

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mid-1990s and the middle of the next decade because of its significant increase in income inequality. Statistics Canada recently released some income figures. Incomes from the 2006 census show an increase in inequality. That study was based on full-time workers' median earnings between 1980 and 2005. The figures show that earnings grew by 16.4% for people with the top incomes, while they stagnated for people in the middle income group and fell by 20.6% for people in the bottom income group.

To summarize, from 1980 to 2005, earnings for the top group rose by 16.4%, while middle-income Canadians saw their incomes stagnate and earnings for the bottom group declined sharply. In the richest group of Canadians, the big winners were the super-rich, the top 1%. That increase is not attributable solely to wise investments; it also stems from the base salaries paid to bank presidents and corporate CEOs, which have exploded in recent years. So we should not be surprised to see that in recent weeks, income inequality has been in the media spotlight.

The Occupy Wall Street movement, for example, and the movements that followed it are a signal that the public is rejecting the income gap between the richest 1% and the other 99%. There is a widespread fear now being felt around the world that the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. And that fear certainly does not seem to be unfounded. For example, a recent study by a professor at Berkeley found that income inequality in the United States is at an all-time high, even exceeding the levels observed during the Great Depression. The example he gives is that the top 10% of earners in 2007 accounted for nearly 50% of total income in the United States.

In contrast, Denmark and Sweden, which have the lowest levels of poverty among children and the working age population, are also undisputed leaders in terms of income equality. The relationship between social spending and poverty rates has become clearer over time. Thus, it is not surprising that these countries have strong traditions of redistributing wealth. They have been able to keep poverty rates down thanks to a universal welfare policy that has been effectively combined with job creation strategies that support gender equality and accessibility. That is the example the NDP would like to follow, because it appears that the model that this government insists on copying is producing extremely disappointing results.

According to the Conference Board, one reason for the growing inequality in Canada is globalization, which rewards highly qualified workers while leaving everyone else behind. This situation is also largely the result of the interaction between family factors and economic factors. The gap is widening considerably between families with two highly educated spouses and those that have only one breadwinner or those with no one who can work.

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• (1615)

In addition, government transfer programs meant to address some of these inequalities are not as effective as they were 20 years ago. For instance, fewer workers are receiving employment insurance benefits, and social assistance rates do not always mimic the cost of living. To date, many of the tax breaks granted by this government have disproportionately benefited the wealthy, because they have not been applied based on income. They have instead centred mainly around lowering the GST and around tax credit programs.

Speaking of inequality, we must also address the issue of poverty in Canada. Once again according to the Conference Board of Canada, more than 12% of adult Canadians live in relative poverty. That is twice as high as the rates found in Denmark and Sweden. Canada ranks 15th out of 17 peer countries in terms of the working age poverty rate. Canada's working-age poverty rate increased from 9.4% in the mid-1990s to 12.2% in the mid-2000s.

While the NDP has been asking this government to rethink its plan to promote employment, a recent OECD report states that poverty rates are directly dependent on the ability of household members to be gainfully employed. The OECD concludes that the failure to tackle the poverty and exclusion facing millions of families and their children is not only socially reprehensible, but it will also weigh heavily on countries' capacity to sustain economic growth in years to come.

The relationship between social spending and poverty rates is striking. Among working-age adults, the relative poverty rate is lower in countries with higher social spending.

Why so much talk about income inequality and poverty? Because there are direct links between inequality and a country's economic growth. It is reasonable for there to be a compromise between equality and effectiveness so that wealth redistribution does not impede productivity. A recent OECD study on income inequality notes:

A society in which income was distributed perfectly equally would not be a desirable place either. People who work harder, or are more talented than others, should have more income. What matters, in fact, is equality of opportunity, not equality of outcomes.

However, the idea that income inequality reduces the potential for growth is real. Income inequality undermines social cohesion, leading to social conflicts. A study done by Michael Forster highlights new research showing that a society should be concerned about income inequality. He says that a number of authors have produced evidence that poor income distribution could ultimately have a negative effect on economic growth through education, health and access to the labour market.

In a letter published in *Le Devoir*, Paul Bernard, a professor at the Université de Montréal, showed that social investment is a key to economic development. To support his position, he cited numerous studies that show that social spending does not operate to slow growth. In fact, it actually operates to provide everyone with the prerequisites that enable them to participate in the labour market in large numbers and on the best terms. This strong participation helps to increase the productivity of the economy and means that the taxes needed for maintaining those services can be raised intelligently.

In other words, economic development can be achieved through social investment, with the bonus of a healthy additional dose of social justice. So we have to look at combating income inequality not just as a matter of principle, but also as a practical contribution, what social development can and must do for economic development. Providing all Canadians with access to adequate health care services, a quality education and social and family services appropriate to their situation is what will ensure the long-term development of our economy. In other words, we have to redistribute wealth in order to create wealth.

So it seems there is an alternative to this government's economic plan, which is an attempt to stimulate the economy by cutting social programs and the services provided to the public under the false pretext of contributing to economic growth and helping Canadians find jobs.

This plan does not do enough for the Canadian economy. We need a government that demonstrates leadership, today even more than in previous years. Canada is not immune to a new recession. That is why we cannot stop there. We have to be proactive and redistribute wealth in order to create wealth.

• (1620)

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think Canadian corporations have roughly \$500 billion in cash in their coffers. This does not contribute to investment, economic growth or job creation. What is missing from this bill to ensure that this money can be used for our economy and the Canadian public?

Ms. Annick Papillon: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his question. This bill lacks more serious measures for helping Canadian families. I think that is key. As I was saying, we have to put an end to the Conservatives' erroneous way of talking about social spending, spending for social programs and public services. It is more of a social investment to invest in an education system and a universal health care system. This will then allow us to deal with other potential recessions and to keep our heads above water.

[English]

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I commend my colleague across the way for her speech. However, I would like her comments on a very serious situation that occurred in Quebec. In fact, many of the people who probably elected her are familiar with the Earl Jones case.

As Bill C-13 discusses a securities regulator and there are provinces that are on board to try to address this problem, I would like to hear what the member says to the victims of the Earl Jones case when Joey Davis of the Earl Jones victims committee said very clearly, "We support the idea of a single national regulatory body overseeing financial organizations".

[Translation]

Ms. Annick Papillon: Mr. Speaker, I will talk about my weekend. I watched the documentaries *Meltdown: The Secret History of the Global Financial Collapse* and *Inside Job*. In light of that and the fact that protesters are camping out just a few blocks away from my Quebec City office, I can also say that we really have to take the downturn more seriously. I do not really see a change in strategy in this bill. Unfortunately, I believe that this bill does not contain the tools required to deal with potential recessions or economic difficulties in this country. That is what I have to say. There are solutions. They are found on this side of the House and they can also be found among those participating in Occupy Wall Street, Occupy Quebec City, Occupy Vancouver. The solutions can be found there. We must listen to the people. They have suggestions. I believe that is where we must listen to the people.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague what Quebecers have to say about firearms registration in light of the Polytechnique incident that resulted in the death of 14 women. The Conservative government has eliminated the registration of firearms and has even appropriated the registry. It wants to destroy the registry to ensure that the Province of Quebec will not even be able to have its own gun registry. This is a government that wants to build prisons and put everyone behind bars. I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about crime and especially about what happened in Quebec.

• (1625)

Ms. Annick Papillon: Mr. Speaker, first I would like to warmly thank the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst for his question. It is official; Quebec is concerned. We are concerned that this government does not seem to have a very strong knowledge of economics since the budget has to be revised constantly. The government is always saying that there will be no deficit when, in the end, there will be one. These are reasons for concern; however, we are also having difficulty recognizing the values of this government, which Quebec does not share. I can tell you that.

In fact, the firearms registry gave the government, the police and organizations that deal with violence against women the power to act. The fact that the government will not even transfer the registry to the provinces is truly appalling. Moreover, some of my Quebec counterparts came to Ottawa to beg the Conservatives, who want to abolish the firearms registry, to transfer the registry to the provinces so that they can carry on the work.

Not only is this government failing to do its duty in terms of public safety but it will not even allow the \$2 billion that was invested in the registry to be recovered. If it would, passing the bill and abolishing the registry would not be a complete waste. It would allow the provinces to do the work.

[English]

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise in the House today and speak to Bill C-13, the keeping Canada's economy and jobs growing act.

Thanks to the policies of our government, Canada continues to be an economic leader during a period of global economic uncertainty. We know that Canada is not immune to the economic storm that continues to rage across the globe. That is why our government is

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launching the next phase of Canada's economic action plan. We are taking action that will help Canadians through this period of economic uncertainty.

In the bill we are debating today, I will outline how our government is taking measures that will support families and communities, promote job creation and economic growth.

Our Conservative government believes in keeping families strong. We believe hard-working Canadians deserve to keep more of the money they earn. That is why, since 2006, the government has cut taxes over 120 times. As a result, the overall tax burden facing families is at its lowest level in nearly 50 years.

We have removed over one million Canadians from the tax rolls. We have increased the amount Canadians can earn tax free. We have reduced the GST from 7% to 6% to 5%, putting nearly \$1,000 back in the pocket of an average family.

We introduced the universal child care benefit offering families more choice in child care by providing \$1,200 per year for a child under the age of six. We introduced the child tax credit providing personal income tax relief of up to \$320 in 2011 for each child under the age of 18. We introduced the children's fitness tax credit promoting physical fitness among children through a credit of up to \$500 in eligible fees for programs associated with physical activity.

We brought in the landmark tax-free savings account, the most important personal savings vehicle since the RRSP. We eliminated the marriage penalty for one-earner families by increasing the spousal amount to the same level as the basic personal amount. We introduced a registered disability savings plan to help families of children with disabilities save for their child's future care.

For our seniors, we provided more than \$2 billion in annual targeted tax relief through such measures as pension income splitting, increases in the age credit amount and a doubling of the pension credit amount.

In addition, families are benefiting from other new targeted measures like the first-time home buyers tax credit, the expanded home buyers plan and the public transit tax credit. Due to our strong record of tax relief, total savings for a typical Canadian family is over \$3,000 since this government took office.

Bill C-13 includes several new measures that are designed to support families by leaving more money in their pockets. One of those measures is the family caregiver tax credit.

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The family caregiver tax credit is a 15% non-refundable tax credit on an amount of \$2,000 for caregivers of loved ones with infirmities, including for the first time spouses, common law partners and minor children. This proposal has received wide support from those who know the challenges faced by families that care for a loved one with a serious illness.

The Canadian Caregiver Coalition said:

—(CCC) applauds the Federal Budget...The announcement of a Family Caregiver Tax Credit demonstrates the federal government's commitment to families and the caregiving responsibilities that they assume...We are pleased to see the federal government recognizing and furthering the support for family caregivers by mitigating their financial burden through this program.

The Canadian Cancer Society said:

A new family caregiver tax credit announced in [Budget 2011]...is a good start in providing more support for all family caregivers.

We welcome the tax credit and other measures in the budget as a step in the right direction.

To further assist caregivers, the bill would remove the \$10,000 limit on the amount of eligible expenses caregivers could claim on behalf of a financially dependent relative. Surely we can all agree in the House that families that care for a loved one are deserving of this tax relief.

In addition to supporting caregivers, we are supporting communities. As part of our economic action plan we partnered with communities and provinces to build the infrastructure needed to ensure long-term economic growth and prosperity.

In Bill C-13 we are legislating a permanent annual investment of \$2 billion in the gas tax fund to provide predictable, long-term infrastructure funding for our municipalities. On this matter, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities said that budget 2011 "delivered a vital commitment to cities and communities to develop a new, long-term federal infrastructure plan".

● (1630)

In the next phase of our economic action plan, we will continue our efforts to support our local communities, not just through infrastructure investments but through a number of other initiatives as well.

To help address the issue of a shortage of doctors and nurses working in rural and remote areas, Bill C-13 proposes that practising family physicians will be eligible for federal Canada student loan forgiveness of up to \$8,000 per year to a maximum of \$40,000. Nurse practitioners and nurses would be eligible for federal Canada student loan forgiveness of up to \$4,000 per year to a maximum of \$20,000.

I am pleased to report that these proposals have also received broad support. The Canadian Medical Association said:

The initiative to address the shortage of primary care physicians recognizes the particular challenges of providing health care in rural and remote areas of the country.

The Canadian Nurses Association added:

...Canada's nurses are pleased to see nursing and medical student debt relief as well as tax relief for Canadians providing care for family members.

While Bill C-13 addresses the health of rural communities, it also contains important measures to keep our communities safe by recognizing the vital role volunteer firefighters play in serving our

communities, often putting themselves at great risk for the safety of their neighbours. In fact, nearly 85,000 volunteer firefighters provide their services to protect the lives and property of Canadians living in urban and rural communities across Canada. In recognition of their brave service, Bill C-13 proposes a new 15% non-refundable volunteer firefighter tax credit on an amount of \$3,000 for volunteer firefighters who perform at least 200 hours of service to their communities during a year. This builds on our government's action to ensure first responders receive the proper training to respond to emergencies involving hazardous materials. Unfortunately, both the Liberals and the NDP voted against this \$1 million initiative that was contained in budget 2007.

I hope that this time opposition members will join with our government to provide the critical support for our volunteer firefighters provided in this bill. The Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs said:

The Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs (CAFC) strongly applauds the Conservative government's introduction of a \$3,000 tax credit for volunteer firefighters in Budget 2011. This is a crucial measure to ensure the retention and recruitment of volunteer firefighters which will help keep Canadian communities safe.

Thanks to the policies of this government, Canada has avoided the worst of the global economic downturn. Although there remains a great deal of uncertainty in the global economy, the IMF is maintaining its positive outlook for Canada, thanks to our sound and stable economy along with the positive measures taken in the next phase of Canada's economic action plan. This is yet another example of Canada's global economic leadership, which includes nearly 600,000 net new jobs created since July 2009, the strongest job growth record in the G7; the World Economic Forum, for the fourth consecutive year, ranking Canada's banks as the soundest in the world; *Forbes* magazine ranking Canada as the best place in the world for businesses to grow and create jobs; the IMF and the OECD forecasting Canada's economy will be among the strongest in the G7 this year and next; and Fitch Ratings, Moody's and Standard & Poor's all giving Canada a triple-A credit rating.

Bill C-13 would provide support to Canadians who care for infirm family members. It would support our local communities by providing measures to bring doctors and nurses to rural communities. It would acknowledge the vital role volunteer firefighters play in keeping us safe. It also would support local infrastructure. These measures combined would build on Canada's economic leadership by ensuring more money stays in the pockets of hard-working Canadians and is spent on services that matter most to them.

We campaigned on the issues contained in Bill C-13 and we are keeping our campaign commitments. I am pleased to stand in this House and support this bill and I would encourage all hon. members to do the same.

• (1635)

[Translation]

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, because of my background, I am very interested in Bill C-13 regarding the partial forgiveness of student loans for doctors and nurses.

I would like to make a comment to the hon. member opposite. I listened closely to his speech. This measure is not sufficient to help doctors and nurses in rural areas. The criteria—including those that may prevent specialists from practising in rural areas—exclude a large number of people who are filling the positions we greatly need filled across the country. This measure does not really solve the problem of the shortage of doctors and nurses. It does not include any initiatives to increase registration in medical schools and nursing programs. It does not solve the current shortage of front-line medical professionals. It simply serves to move health care professionals from urban to rural areas.

[English]

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member would look at the budget, she would see that we have increased spending on health care by 6% per year since taking office, for a total of 36%.

The provinces will make their own decisions on how they allocate their teaching spaces.

However, this government has not taken the route that the former government did by slashing health and social transfers. We have continued to invest in those transfers to the provinces so that they can make their own decisions on how they will provide teaching spaces for people like doctors and nurses. We have broad support for this measure, which will encourage doctors, nurses and nurse practitioners to serve in underserved rural areas.

We think the opposition should support this legislation.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonaville—Gander—Grand Falls—Windor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I believe the quote my colleague used was from Dan Demers, who said:

We welcome the tax credit and other measures in the budget as a step in the right direction.

However, the second part of it reads:

But looking forward, we need to continue to work collectively to ensure more is done so that all family caregivers in Canada get the financial support they need and deserve.

Unfortunately, with a non-refundable tax credit not everybody will benefit. Here is what the society said:

The Society also believes that a non-taxable, monthly Family Caregiver tax benefit should be established to help family caregivers with costs.

It also talked about more flexibility and a timeframe for financial benefits.

Obviously, the step in the right direction should be taken a little further according to the Canadian Cancer Society. I wonder when the next step will be taken. Perhaps the member could comment on that.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Speaker, I am a new member to the House but I was watching very carefully during the 13 years that the Liberal Party was in government. The Liberals did not deliver for Canadians. They did not deliver for volunteer firefighters. They did not deliver

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for family caregivers. They had 13 years to deliver. If only they had a little more time, they might have finally managed to bring in things that are supported in this budget.

That member should support the bill.

• (1640)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I commend my colleague on his impassioned speech with the emphasis on our volunteer firefighters.

In the past, regular force volunteer firefighters had not supported this tax credit initiative but this time they have. I am wondering if the member could explain why it is so important? How will volunteer firefighters benefit? Could he also explain the type of out-of-pocket expenses that our volunteer firefighters endure?

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Speaker, this provision is well supported in Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon. There is a large rural component in my riding. The majority of the communities in my riding are served by volunteer firefighters. Not only do they give of their time and of their resources but they put their very lives on the line for our communities. This is the least we can do. They have been asking for this for years. Rick Casson, the former member for Lethbridge, was a strong supporter of this initiative. We have delivered where others have failed to do so.

[Translation]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak to Bill C-13, Keeping Canada's Economy and Jobs Growing Act, because this may be the last opportunity I have to talk about the 2011 budget. I would like to take this opportunity to speak more broadly about the differences between the Conservative government's approach and the New Democrats' approach to the economy, which is partially addressed by this bill and has also been addressed in other budget implementation bills.

The difference in approach involves macroeconomics. On the Conservative side, in general, they applaud tax cuts, particularly the ones that benefit corporations. We think this approach is ineffective from the standpoint of investment. The reason given by the Conservatives when they promise these tax cuts may be reflected in the mantra they constantly repeat: that the NDP wants to raise taxes by \$10 billion. I think the people at home should know that this simply means going back to the 2009 corporate tax rate. It does amount to nearly \$10 billion. But that money is not being stolen from anyone's pocket and is not just going to sit there and do nothing. It is for investing in infrastructure. That is the big difference between our approach and the Conservatives'.

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There is at least one situation where corporate tax cuts are legitimate, and that is when a private enterprise needs cash in order to invest. In that case, a tax cut will, in fact, enable the corporation to free up the cash that is needed so it can invest and thus create jobs. However, we have to be very aware of what the present situation is. In 2001, Canadian corporations were sitting on \$157 billion in cash. That \$157 billion was lying dormant in the banks, in bank accounts, and not being invested.

That \$157 billion, already a sizeable amount in 2001, grew to \$477 billion in 2011. Nearly \$500 billion is currently unused, sitting in accounts, and not being invested. Corporations may have various reasons for not investing. They are understandable. However, a tax cut like the one the Conservative government wants to push ahead with—a tax cut that would lower the tax rate to 15%—hands cash to companies that very often do not need it, because the cash they already have is not even being invested.

So when they say cutting taxes on corporations is going to create the jobs we need today and it is part of a grand economic action plan, that is entirely incorrect.

In the present situation, where the country has a major infrastructure deficit, it is crucial, in a real economic action plan—and I am not claiming that what the government is currently doing is a real economic action plan—that we look at what the needs are. In this case, we have an infrastructure deficit that is often estimated at over \$500 billion. This is a problem we have to start solving before we move on to completely general measures that often miss their mark, precisely because they are general. These measures have to be targeted.

In 2001, the federal corporate tax rate was 28%. That is going to be reduced to 15%. When we went from 28% to 15%, we should note, that cut did not generate any improvement or increase in real investment. That is additional evidence that tax cuts do not necessarily produce an increase in investment or in the number of jobs.

It is worrisome to see the direction the government is choosing to take with its big economic action measure, which is in fact an ideological measure to cut taxes at all costs, because it believes that this is going to magically create jobs, even if it is not invested. It is funny how the government often laughs at the observations and suggestions made by the official opposition, which places more emphasis on infrastructure investments.

I would also like to point out, and this is a crucial point in the debate we are having, that even the Department of Finance, in the 2009-2010 budget, acknowledged the repercussions of various measures and acknowledged that the corporate tax cut was the least effective measure for creating jobs and economic growth.

• (1645)

For every \$1 in corporate tax cuts, about 30¢ in economic growth is generated. However, if we take that same dollar and, instead of giving corporations a tax cut, we decide to invest it directly in infrastructure, we create \$1.50 in economic growth for each dollar invested. If we take that dollar and we decide to help low-income families or the unemployed directly—and again this is the

Department of Finance saying this, we get \$1.60 in economic growth for each dollar invested.

We are talking about measures that are five times more effective than corporate taxes. Nonetheless, the Conservative government is running off in a direction that has us simply giving away \$2 billion or \$3 billion or \$4 billion in tax room to companies that very often do not need that money because they have no opportunities to invest it.

I always find it odd when the government blames the opposition, any opposition party, because it does not vote for some micro-measure, even though it may often be very good for certain people or groups in our society. For example, we often talk about volunteer firefighters. These are interesting initiatives that we could conceivably support. However, we do not vote on a budget on a piecemeal basis, but on the document as a whole. And if we look at the whole budget, at the measures and the direction being taken by the government, we find that we cannot support that direction. This is why we oppose the budget. We do not oppose it because we are against volunteer firefighters—quite the contrary—or caregivers, or research and development initiatives. One must realize that, in the Conservative budget, these measures only account for a very small portion of the money invested and that portion is much less than the tax room given to large corporations which, again, will often not invest that money because they have not found any investment opportunities.

I remind hon. members—and we are not the only ones to think so—that there is a corollary to this. I am referring to the other direction that the government is taking, namely, massive spending cuts at a time of economic uncertainty. The last thing we need right now are measures that will reduce demand. Yet, these spending cuts—which are not necessarily included to improve efficiency but to take aim at what are often artificial targets—will result in lower demand, to the point where stimulus measures will be even less effective, assuming that some were. Currently, BMO Nesbitt Burns, the Conference Board of Canada and even the Bank of Canada are opposed to government spending cuts because of the decrease in demand that will follow. We must support demand in difficult times and we are going through difficult times. Generally speaking, Canada is doing well compared to other G7 members, but it should also behave appropriately when faced with risky situations. We should really look at how we can maximize economic performance in our country.

We are talking about infrastructure and I have one or two local examples. I have talked to voters, to organizations and to the 39 municipalities in my riding. There are glaring infrastructure needs. We have to move in that direction. For example, in Rimouski—Neigette, there are needs in terms of recreation centres and municipal complexes, including the Saint-Narcisse recreation centre. And yet there will be no infrastructure money for them. I am trying to find some right now. I am trying to persuade the government to move in that direction, but that is not the direction it wants to move in. There are roads that need rebuilding, for example in Témiscouata and Pohenégamook, in particular, not to mention upgrading water systems. For the tourism projects that are of crucial importance, upgrading is needed. In particular, the Trois-Pistoles—Les Escoumins ferry is at risk of ending up in permanent dry dock as we speak because there is no infrastructure investment for a major tourism project in one of the poorest RCMs in Quebec.

There are infrastructure projects. It is generally agreed that we have a major infrastructure deficit in Canada and we need to invest in that area. While the government is boasting about investing so much in infrastructure over the last two or three or four years, what must be recognized is that there would not have been so much investment if there had been no crisis. If we will recall, the government thought it was losing its grip on Parliament in 2009 and unilaterally prorogued it. Ultimately, it followed the opposition parties' direction. That is really the direction we have to move in.

• (1650)

We have to stop adopting ineffective measures like overall corporate tax cuts. We have to look at what the economic and industrial needs are and think about fixing the infrastructure deficit. The federal government is in a position to work with the provinces and municipalities to do this.

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague on his speech. He alluded to the worthwhile measures in this bill, for example the one relating to volunteer firefighters, and how our Conservative friends are adept at using a few shiny apples to hide a load of rotten apples that nobody wants, like the unbelievable intention of eliminating funding for political parties.

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher. We have been discussing a budget for several weeks now. A budget often contains dozens, hundreds, sometimes thousands of measures. There are some that are positive, on which we might agree, and others that we oppose. Among the others, there are the subsidies or the funding given to political parties that my colleague mentioned. This is a fundamental issue, because it directly affects the practice of Canadian democracy. We had very little time to debate this because it was one measure among the many in the budget.

Ideally, if the government wanted to be more effective and have the support of the opposition for this measure, it could present a budget piece by piece. That would provide a better idea of the philosophical differences or similarities between the parties.

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. I would like to quote some journalists who have clearly said that

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what the Conservative government is doing corresponds to what Quebec wants. The quote is in English.

[English]

The *Calgary Herald* editorial said:

The \$2-per-vote subsidy...weighs heavily in terms of its political significance. The measure had a distorted benefit in Quebec for the Bloc Québécois, that only had to campaign in one province. Phasing out the subsidy also forces political parties to do their own fundraising, while asking Canadians to back up their beliefs by putting their hard-earned dollars behind the parties they support.

[Translation]

If this measure is supported across Canada, particularly in Quebec, why are this member and his party opposed to what Canadians and Quebecers want?

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, in the comments that were made, I did not hear any reference from Quebec, but a reference from an Alberta newspaper about Quebec. That is quite different.

The question she asked has to do with a simple mathematical and budgetary question. But the issue is much more fundamental than that. I am sure that she remembers very well the political party financing measure that was adopted along with some fundamental changes, reforms to the way things operated. This was to provide assistance to the different parties and to allow the expression of a democratic vote.

It is true that this can distort things. The current system can distort things. The Conservative government has a majority with less than 40% of the votes. It would make sense to see some reforms to the parliamentary system. That is just part of it. This could also have the negative effect of preventing the expression of diverse voices, like the voice of our colleague from Saanich—Gulf Islands, whose presence and party largely depend on these subsidies or financing.

• (1655)

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his speech. In terms of government funding for political parties, we are talking about paying \$1.75 for democracy, which is less than the cost of a coffee and a timbit at Tim Hortons. We could talk about the quote from the Alberta newspaper that was mentioned by the hon. member for Saint-Boniface, but even a country like France says not to do that. Canadians should continue contributing to parties through their taxes. They are trying to make us believe that people are paying for political parties they do not want. For each vote, a political party receives an amount that does not even equal the cost of a coffee and a doughnut. What is so wrong about that, for the sake of democracy?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order. We need time for a response.

The hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques has 30 seconds.

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Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, that question is excellent. A sense of proportion is also needed. This measure is worth \$27 million. The Conservatives have spent over \$60 million on advertising for the economic action plan. It is not a question of cuts here, but rather the fact that the Conservatives have an excellent fundraising machine that has been put to the test. They do not need a political party financing system. They want to use this to weaken the opposition. If it were simply a budget measure, we would not be having the democratic debate that we are having here today and that we should be having.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Montcalm, Disability Insurance; the hon. member for London—Fanshawe, Seniors; the hon. member for Western Arctic, Aviation Safety.

[English]

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Mississauga East—Cooksville.

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon (Mississauga East—Cooksville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise today to speak to Bill C-13, keeping Canada's economy and jobs growing act. Canadians gave our government a strong mandate to implement our low tax plan to help support job creation and economic growth, and we are doing exactly that.

Forbes ranked Canada number one in the world in its 2011 annual survey of the best countries for business, for our economic and personal freedoms, innovation and relatively low red tape. Canada has the strongest job growth in the G7 and the IMF expects Canada to continue to have the strongest growth in the G7 through the years 2011-12. We have the lowest government net debt to GDP ratio in the G7 by far.

The World Economic Forum rated our financial system as the soundest in the world. For the fourth consecutive year, our triple A credit rating has been renewed because of our economic resiliency, very high government financial strength, and low susceptibility to event risk.

Canada's economic record is admirable; however, we do recognize there is much work to be done to protect the fragile recovery and to help more Canadians return to work. That is why the next phase of Canada's economic action plan is so important. We must stay the course to protect Canadians from the turbulent economic uncertainties facing our friends and neighbours around the world.

Before the global recession hit, our Conservative government paid down nearly \$40 billion of the debt, bringing Canada's debt to its lowest level in 25 years. Our fiscal responsible and aggressive debt reduction placed Canada in the best possible position to weather the global recession. When the global recession hit, we made a deliberate decision to run a temporary deficit to protect our economy and jobs, and all parties in Parliament agreed.

We will continue to be aggressive in our support of job creation. We will enhance or extend programs to help businesses keep workers, renew programs to help unemployed workers, introduce hiring credits for small businesses, support youth entrepreneurs,

reduce red tape, and legislate permanent gas tax funding for municipalities.

Families will benefit from a new family caregiver tax credit, a new children's arts tax credit, and an enhanced medical expense tax credit. This builds on top of the action our government has taken to support families since 2006. Due to our strong record of tax relief, total savings for a typical family are over \$3,000.

Our Conservative government values the contributions made by seniors who have made our country as great as it is. That is why the next phase of Canada's economic action plan introduces new measures to improve the quality of life and expand opportunities for Canadian seniors including extending the eco-energy home retrofit program, eliminating the mandatory retirement age for federally regulated employees, extending the targeted initiative for older workers, enhancing the new horizons for seniors program, and enhancing the GIS for eligible low income seniors who will receive additional annual benefits of up to \$600 for single seniors and \$840 for couples, helping more than 680,000 seniors across Canada.

We will keep taxes low for Canadian families. Our Conservative government believes in low taxes and leaving more money where it belongs, in the pockets of hard-working Canadian families and job creating businesses.

We have cut taxes over 120 times since 2006, reducing the overall tax burden to its lowest level in nearly 50 years.

We removed over one million low income families, individuals and seniors from the tax rolls.

●(1700)

The next phase of Canada's economic action plan continues with the government's commitment to support Canadian students. We all want students to succeed in the global economy with the help of the best education possible.

We are investing in education in the north, including \$9 million to expand territorial colleges' literacy and numeracy programs, particularly in remote communities.

We are extending tax relief for skills certification exams and doubling the in-study income exemption.

To further support families and students, we are increasing the family income threshold for part-time Canada student loans and Canada student grant recipients, bringing the eligibility threshold in line with the threshold for full-time students.

The government will respect taxpayers and phase out the direct subsidy of political parties. We are closing numerous tax loopholes that allow a few businesses and individuals to avoid paying their fair share of tax.

There is considerable uncertainty surrounding the economic outlook. The key near-term risk is the sovereign debt and banking crisis in Europe. This government will continue to implement the next phase of Canada's economic action plan to support jobs and growth. We will continue to closely monitor the global and Canadian economic situation. If the economy weakens significantly, we are prepared to respond as necessary in a flexible and measured manner to support Canadian jobs and growth.

In meeting its commitment to return to budgetary balance, the government will not raise taxes or cut transfers to persons, including those for seniors, children and the unemployed, or transfers to other levels of government in support of health care and social services, equalization and gas tax transfers to municipalities.

Going forward, the government will maintain its focus on the priorities set out in the next phase of Canada's economic action plan by supporting job creation; supporting families and communities; investing in innovation, education and training; and preserving Canada's fiscal advantage.

Productive and sustainable investments in these key areas will continue to help lay the foundation for long-term economic growth and prosperity for all Canadians.

• (1705)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for that very fine speech. He talked about a number of the very important measures. I would like the member to reflect on his riding and tell us about some of the things that are going to be of huge benefit to the people of Mississauga East—Cooksville in terms of moving forward with the budget implementation act.

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon: Mr. Speaker, my riding is a very diverse riding. It has many young families and those families will benefit from measures proposed in this act. The tax credits for arts and culture and physical activities will benefit many young families in my riding.

There are also many businesses in my riding. The measures we are proposing for businesses in this act are very important because many of them will be able to hire new workers and many of them will be able to keep workers who are employed now.

I have had very positive feedback from my constituents regarding the proposed bill.

[Translation]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague across the floor mentioned help for families, but I really have to wonder what help for families he is talking about.

Is the member aware or would he agree that the gap between wealthy people and those living in poverty is growing?

What does he really think his bill will do for the families that are most in need of support from this government? The reality is that

these families will receive nothing from the tax credits the member is boasting about.

[English]

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon: Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the hon. member that we live in the best country in the world. This is not a third world country. This is a country where people come every year, from around the world, as immigrants. They work hard and they are successful.

Of course, there is always more that needs to be done or that can be done, but this is a part of the process. It is not done in one step. This is done in a gradual process. That is exactly what the bill and its measures would address.

I would like to stress that this is not a third world country. We are the best country in the world and we should all work together to improve it. I hope the hon. member will support the bill.

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his past contribution as a leader in the Polish community in this country. He has done a very fabulous job and I want to thank him for that.

The Conservative Party committed to implementing these different things that we have in the budget bill during the election.

My question for the member is this. How important is it to him, representing his riding, that what we said during the election is what we are actually doing here in the House of Commons?

• (1710)

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon: Mr. Speaker, as my hon. colleague said, during the election we actually presented our economic program to Canadians. When I was knocking on doors, the issues that were important to the people I talked with were jobs, safe streets, a good future for our children, and good education. That is exactly what the bill addresses. That is why we are working hard on this side of the House and that is why we are asking the members on the opposite side of the House to support us in working for all Canadians.

[Translation]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, earlier, the Minister of State for Transport spoke to us about economic recovery and now the hon. member is talking about maintaining the economy. However, under this same government, during its reign from 2008 to 2011, between the two elections, Canada's debt increased by \$10 billion.

The International Monetary Fund predicts that the rate of unemployment will increase in 2012 and, I believe from my reading, Scotiabank recently questioned the rosy economic predictions made by the United States and Canada last year.

How can the hon. member tell us there will be economic growth and job growth?

[English]

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member asks, how can I have confidence?

This government's record speaks for itself. Our economy is the strongest economy among the G7 nations. We are making progress. Our financial system is the best in the world.

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Of course, we are in difficult times. We are connected to the world economy and we are affected by turbulence in other parts of the world. However, we are on the right path and we will keep working for the best interests of this country and Canadians.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to speak to Bill C-13, which is part of phase two of our economic action plan that has many important elements in terms of moving our country forward.

It is really important that I first start with a brief history of our low tax plan for jobs and growth.

We presented a budget in March 2011 in the House. At that time, the opposition did not see fit to support that budget and triggered an unnecessary election. During our election campaign, we spoke to Canadians throughout the country and told them that we would reintroduce the same budget. It was part of our election platform.

It is important to recognize that this is a budget that had the support of Canadians across the country. We are following through on our commitment to Canadians, who returned us to the House with a strong, stable majority government.

In June of this year, we reintroduced our bill, Bill C-3, and before the House rose for the summer, we were able to implement very important measures, such as increasing the guaranteed income supplement for seniors. Now it is fall, there are many elements left and this is our opportunity to continue that very important work.

Members of the finance committee had the opportunity to look at the bill in great detail. As we all know, it is a very big bill and we went through it paragraph by paragraph, looking at all the different measures. Unfortunately, I do not have time to talk about all the great measures, but I would like to focus on and highlight some of the things that are incredibly important for Canadians.

The first thing I would like to highlight is the rural and remote riding forgiveness for student loans in terms of health care services. It is important to look at a statistic. According to the Society of Rural Physicians of Canada, 31.4% of Canada's population, or roughly nine million people, live in predominantly rural regions. Towns under 10,000 account for 22.2% of the population, but they only have 10% of the physicians. Right there we see a big problem. MPs and people who live in Toronto, Ottawa and larger settings recognize and often speak about the challenges in getting a family doctor and access to care. If we look at what is happening in rural communities, it is absolutely compounded many times over.

There have been historical challenges in terms of recruiting doctors and nurses to small areas. One situation we need to look at is if someone were in an accident in Ottawa, an ambulance would quickly come to take the person to a hospital, where there would be a team of doctors and an operating room waiting. Residents in Princeton, British Columbia, as one example, may receive a notice on Friday saying that there are no doctors available to be on call for emergencies on the weekend and if they have emergencies, they should drive three hours to the nearest hospital because the hospital cannot staff the emergency room. This is happening many times throughout our country and our government recognizes that things need to be done.

The other thing that was happening was the lack of physicians was pitting community against community, with each one sort of upping the ante in terms of enticing physicians to go there. This is an important measure that will level the playing field so a physician or nurse who chooses to go to Pemberton, Lillooet or any small community will have the same advantages. It prevents communities from pitting one against the other.

The Canadian Medical Association indicated that roughly 900 doctors and 1,600 nurses who graduate annually are in debt to the Canada student loans program. It is estimated that the average medical student graduate with a debt load in the order of \$100,000 will be eligible to have \$8,000 per year written off their loans to a maximum of \$40,000, while nurses and nurse practitioners will be eligible for a \$4,000 per year writeoff to a maximum of \$20,000 if they undertake a stint in a remote community.

• (1715)

During the election I had an opportunity to talk to nursing students in our local university and rural physicians. I asked them if this was an important measure. Without hesitation, every one of them said that doctors were enticed to come to their communities. They would love the community, the career, the opportunities and the beauty and believed that they would stay. They were thankful for this important measure.

It is important to note that this is only one of many measures. It really builds on the \$39.5 million in funding to increase the number of residency physicians that we announced in February 2011. Again, I am not saying that one strategy is going to solve the problem, but there are many pieces that we are working on in partnership with the provinces and territories that ultimately have the responsibility.

Another important measure I would like to highlight is the mineral exploration tax credit. Exploration and development of Canada's rich mineral resources offers important investments and employment benefits in many parts of the country, especially in rural or remote regions. The temporary 15% mineral exploration tax credit is a measure designed to assist junior mining companies in raising new equity through the issuance of flow-through shares. This additional financing helps exploration companies to maintain or increase their level of exploration activities.

We invested in the METC through the global economic downturn as a way of supporting innovation and job creation in the mining sector. Following the extensions in Canada's economic action plan in budget 2010, the credit was scheduled to expire on March 31, 2011. In support of the economic recovery, budget 2011 extended the credit for an additional year.

It is important to note that in an average year METC investors collectively provide companies with \$400 million in new financing to spend on grassroots exploration in Canada. This money has to be spent in Canada thereby ensuring that if a mine is discovered, the benefits and jobs associated will come to Canadians directly. Therefore, if even a single mine is discovered, the taxes are paid to all levels of government, and they are significant.

It is also important to note that the Mining Association of Canada reports that \$8.4 billion was paid to the government by mining industries in 2011. Again, this is another important measure in terms of jobs and economic growth.

One thing I have certainly heard very clearly is the importance of the gas tax funding for our municipalities. Infrastructure has been an ongoing challenge for them. They often will have acute care needs in terms of water, sewer and roads, but they have to wait for a program to come available. Now they can count on the permanent \$2 billion gas tax funding. Not only that, instead of just using it as a grant program, they can now leverage the funds. They know it is legislated and so they can count on it and leverage it. This is very important for our municipalities.

In quick summary, there are many measures in this budget. At the end of the day, we have been given a mandate by Canadians to move forward with the budget. It is important to support jobs and economic growth. I encourage the opposition to support the bill. Their constituents want them to support it.

• (1720)

BILL C-13—NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, our government has remained steadfastly focused on improving Canada's economy, including our focus in the House this week during jobs and economic growth week. Today we are debating the keeping Canada's economy and jobs growing act. It would implement important measures of our government's low tax plan for jobs and growth, including the job creation tax incentive for small businesses and a tax credit for children's arts and dance lessons.

I must advise that an agreement has not been reached under the provisions of Standing Order 78(1) or 78(2) concerning the proceedings at report stage and third reading of Bill C-13, An Act to implement certain provisions of the 2011 budget as updated on June 6, 2011 and other measures.

Under the provisions of Standing Order 78(3), I give notice that a minister of the Crown will propose at the next sitting a motion to allot a specific number of days or hours for the consideration and disposal of proceedings at those stages.

REPORT STAGE

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments put on the record by the previous speaker.

The government House leader has just stood up, and this is something we see a great deal of lately, and gave notice of time allocation on this legislation because of the government's inability to

work with the opposition in any way and its tendency to use its majority government to prevent any sort of real debate on legislation.

That member has had the opportunity to speak to the bill, but many members of this chamber will never get that opportunity because her government House leader has now said that the government does not want all members to speak to the bill.

If the bill is so good, why does the government want to limit debate on it? Why will the government not allow other members of its own caucus and members of the opposition the opportunity to participate in the debate on an important bill?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, perhaps my hon. colleague did not actually hear the start of my comments when I talked about the history of the bill. The bill was introduced many months ago. The debate has been had with Canadians who, in the last election, said that they believed in our plan and they believed it was the route forward. They supported our government in terms of moving forward with phase two of Canada's economic action plan. That was 34 million Canadians from across the country.

[Translation]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to continue in the same vein.

There is something I do not understand in all this. If their action plan is working so well, then why did 60% of Canadians not support this type of action plan? Why is it that all of us here, the entire opposition, currently want to talk about it, debate it, discuss it and introduce concrete measures? The only thing the government is saying is that it does not want to listen to us, that it will steamroll over anything that happens or anything we say, and that it does not care about those who do not agree with it.

That is the only message I am getting in all this and I find that absolutely offensive.

• (1725)

[English]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, again, Canadians gave us a strong mandate to move forward with this measure. We have talked with Canadians. They have said that the volunteer firefighter tax credit is absolutely important. Parents are asking to share their RESPs with different siblings. Doctors and nurses are waiting for these important measures.

It is time to move forward. Let us get this budget through.

Private Members' Business

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am tremendously impressed with and confident in the good work done in the finance committee by that member. Having served on that committee, I know a tremendous amount of consultation has been done with Canadians across the country. Many members of the opposition have been saying that no one has really had a chance to provide input, but that is absolutely absurd.

Could the member tell us what kind of consultations go on across the country and from whom she has heard information in addition to the departmental and government agencies?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate the question from my hon. colleague because the finance committee is in prebudget consultations right now.

Prebudget consultations means that we travel across the country and we hear from Canadians. We have had over 400 submissions. All of that will go together in preparing our next budget.

It is important to recognize that we have some challenging times ahead because of what is happening in Europe and the United States, but Canada has done exceptionally well.

The consultation process with Canadians on where we are going to go with next year's budget is happening now.

We are talking about something that happened over a year ago. We are talking about measures that Canadians want. These measures were debated across the country for many months.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I see some members are not that enthused that I am delivering this speech. I swear that I will not take any offence.

Since I only have a few minutes, I would love to talk about my riding of Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor. It is the most beautiful little gem on earth. In fact, a lot of the commercials about Newfoundland and Labrador are shot in my riding, with its beautiful cliffs.

An hon. member: And it has a great MP.

Mr. Scott Simms: Sure, it has great representation. On division, right?

I want to follow up on a comment that was made, because I think there are some misconceptions in the debate. I do not think I ever went against the government because it was not consulting enough. I always thought that the consultation process, which was there prior to this government and others, was always substantial enough. Access to one's member of Parliament has always been substantial enough to affect any budget. The problem is, if we are looking at certain costs, and we want to bring the deficit down to a manageable level, we start cherry picking. We have to face up to the fact that we are not going to invest in other things that Canadians want because we cannot afford it.

For example, we would love the volunteer firefighters tax credit to be a refundable tax credit, but it is a non-refundable tax credit. Yet let us not pretend that all Canadians want it. It is the type of thing where we say that we will do this when the deficit is down to zero.

The other issue occurs when we do not fulfill a promise. We might as well be honest and tell people that we cannot do this at this time. A certain amount of respectability needs to be brought back into the level of debate in the House, and certainly in the way the government is acting upon this particular issue.

There are great things in this budget, but the problem is there are a lot more things that need to be done. That is what we debate in this House.

I assume my time for debate has now expired, Madam Speaker.

• (1730)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member will have seven minutes left when the bill returns to the House.

[Translation]

It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

FINANCIAL LITERACY

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC) moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should help improve financial literacy in Canada by: (a) working to implement the recommendations of the Task Force on Financial Literacy; (b) creating, promoting, and continuously upgrade a single source website for financial literacy to increase public awareness and ease access to information for Canadians; (c) requiring federally regulated financial institutions to publicly disclose their contributions to financial literacy initiatives; (d) ensuring the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada works with willing provinces and territories to promote financial literacy to youth through the educational system; and (e) designating November as "Financial Literacy Month".

He said: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the thunderous applause on the very exciting topic of financial literacy.

I am very pleased to rise today to speak to my private member's motion, M-269, on the topic of financial literacy, and I would, for the record, like to read it into the House of Commons *Hansard*:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should help improve financial literacy in Canada by: (a) working to implement the recommendations of the Task Force on Financial Literacy; (b) creating, promoting, and continuously upgrade a single source website for financial literacy to increase public awareness and ease access to information for Canadians; (c) requiring federally regulated financial institutions to publicly disclose their contributions to financial literacy initiatives; (d) ensuring the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada works with willing provinces and territories to promote financial literacy to youth through the educational system; and (e) designating November as "Financial Literacy Month".

We live in a world today where technology is constantly changing, as is personal finance. Only a few decades ago, credit cards were a luxury item. Debit cards did not even exist. Online banking and buying could not even be conceived as they happen today. Mortgage products were standard and choice was limited.

Today, technology and personal finance have advanced tremendously. Canadians are among the most avid users of debit and credit cards in the world. Online banking and buying are part of everyday life. Mortgage products are multiple and choices are diverse.

Private Members' Business

Canadians are faced with increasingly complex financial decisions that have greater potential consequences, and at a younger age than ever before. Each financial decision has consequences, for individuals and families and for our economy as a whole. It is imperative that Canadians gain the knowledge to understand personal financial matters and the impact of broader economic issues, the skills required to apply financial knowledge in everyday life and the confidence to make responsible financial decisions in a manner that is appropriate to their own circumstances.

The reality is that Canadians who lack financial skills and financial knowledge are unfortunately more likely to be spending beyond their means, saving less than they need, building up too much debt and ultimately becoming less able to save sufficiently for their retirement.

Canadians are capable of making good financial decisions, but they want and need the tools to make the right choices.

Increased financial literacy, especially for Canada's youth, can help people with major events, such as saving for college or university, buying a new home, getting married or looking after aging parents. It can help ensure that the investment products that we hold in our RRSPs and other retirement savings are the ones that best match our financial goals and needs. It can make us smarter consumers of financial products so that we do not waste our hard-earned money on services and fees that we do not need.

Increased financial literacy can also make us less susceptible to being duped by fraud artists or by unethical or unregulated financial products that can lead to disastrous loss.

I want to recognize the work that has already been done by the Minister of Finance, for the very significant steps he has taken to protect consumers on various initiatives, such as the changes he has made with respect to credit and debit cards.

I also want to commend him for establishing the Task Force on Financial Literacy. In fact, the impetus for my motion comes from the real necessity to improve the lives of Canadians through financial literacy, but it is a natural extension of the work done by the Task Force on Financial Literacy. I want to thank all the members of the task force for their excellent work and their recommendations, in particular, through their chair, Mr. Don Stewart.

This report released by the task force is a culmination of significant stakeholder consultation and expert analysis. The recommendations and priorities act as a foundation for this motion, and I would like to outline them for colleagues in the House.

The task force's comprehensive strategy is defined by five priorities. The first priority is a shared responsibility for the financial literacy of Canadians among families, governments, educators, financial services providers, employers, labour organizations, businesses and voluntary organizations.

The second priority is leadership and collaboration. Leadership must come from the Government of Canada in the form of appointing an individual focused on executing this strategy, including initiating a formal collaborative partnership among stakeholders.

• (1735)

The third priority is lifelong learning. Financial literacy training begins in the home and should extend to the formal education system and beyond. It should include teachable moments during decision points, such as the purchase of financial products or joining a pension plan.

The fourth priority is delivery and promotion. A sustained public awareness campaign must be developed, focusing on relevant and understandable communications to ensure that all citizens are aware of targeted initiatives that are aimed to benefit them.

The fifth priority is government accountability. The task force recommends that the government appoint an individual who is accountable and reports to Parliament on all these actions.

I want to return to my actual motion and outline the points in specifics.

I encourage members of this House and all Canadians to review the 30 recommendations of the task force. I think it is a very comprehensive report and the task force has done an excellent job.

The second part of the motion is creating, promoting and upgrading a single-source website for financial literacy to increase public awareness and ease access to information for Canadians. There should be a special emphasis on establishing this website to consolidate and disseminate financial literacy programs and initiatives. The Government of Canada does this with seniors' benefits, so that a senior can go to a single-source website. We have a former minister for seniors in the House today, who was instrumental in forming this website.

Many people have commented on the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada and its website. Its website is excellent. However, that could be enhanced and broadened through a single-portal website that would provide information on the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada, the government and other organizations.

For example, Junior Achievement, which does a lot of work even in my riding in the community of Leduc, sends people who work in the financial sector into junior high schools and high schools to talk to the students about financial literacy. There is the Jr. Economic Club of Canada, ABC Life Literacy Canada and the Canadian Foundation for Economic Education. A lot of these groups do excellent work on their own and we need to pull it all together so Canadians can access them through one site.

I would like to commend certain members of the media who do excellent work with respect to financial literacy. Jonathan Chevreau of the *National Post* has recently written a book on financial literacy. I recommend it, and his regular column, to all colleagues in this House. This is one of the priorities in terms of lifelong learning. If people read the *National Post*, the *Globe and Mail* or the *Toronto Sun*, they can understand the concepts that are being discussed.

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The third item in the motion would require federally regulated financial institutions to publicly disclose their contributions to financial literacy initiatives. This would increase the transparency and public awareness of financial institutions' educational efforts. I know institutions already do a lot of work, whether it is the credit unions that I met with today in my office or the traditional big banks.

I would like to compliment, in particular, one person from a bank, Craig Alexander, who appeared before the finance committee today. He has been a true volunteer in this area. He points out that there are people who believe that financial institutions want to take advantage of people. In fact, good institutions, which we have in Canada, have a strong interest in Canadians' increasing their wealth. These institutions have an interest in reaching more Canadians as consumers. If those consumers increase their wealth, the institution has more wealthy customers, so they both benefit.

The next point is ensuring that the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada works with willing provinces and territories to promote financial literacy to youth through the education system. I would like to compliment the FCAC. Canada is often complimented for its financial regulatory system, for the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions, our capital ratios and our leverage ratios. However, one of the real gems we have is the FCAC. It does an excellent job in terms of educating consumers. I encourage all Canadians who may be watching this debate to go to its website and see its excellent initiatives. I would like to expand its role and get it to work with the provinces and territories.

• (1740)

In drafting the motion, some people raised the issue of education being within provincial jurisdiction, especially kindergarten to grade 12, which is a viable concern. However, I am asking that the FCAC, through a curriculum that it has already developed, make it accessible to the provinces and encourage them to adopt it as a formal part of their curriculum, not wait until high school level but actually get it in at the junior high level or even earlier so that Canadians will know from a very early age what kind of decisions they should be making.

The motion that I am presenting here today is in the same spirit that I presented the motion on identity theft two Parliaments ago and the motion on Alzheimer's in the last Parliament. I hope all members will see it in that spirit, read through it and view it as a serious issue that needs to be addressed and something that we can unite around as parliamentarians on both sides of the House. I look forward to their support.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Madam Speaker, while the hon. member did talk about some of the initiatives that we as New Democrats would like to see in financial literacy, if we look through the report, something stands out to us on this side of the House. Although there is some mention about supporting financial literacy for low-income individuals, it does not address the day-to-day meat and potato financial literacy that is needed to support low-income families.

I am wondering what the hon. member can speak to in relation to how we can provide better financial literacy to those who might not have the income necessary to look at stocks, for example, or pensions. What they are worrying about right now is getting through

the day and balancing their chequebooks. The financial literacy they do not have relates to debit cards and credit cards. There is not a lot of talk about that in this huge report. If the member could show us where that is and talk about how the government wants to bring that forward, that would be fantastic.

Mr. James Rajotte: Madam Speaker, my colleague has done a lot of work in raising awareness on issues with respect to credit cards and debit cards. He has had some influence in causing the government to take real action in terms of the voluntary code for credit cards. In fact, it was endorsed by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. This was a huge step forward, as was the 21-day grace period that was introduced by the Minister of Finance, and the protection of the debit system, as it currently is in Canada, not moving toward a percentage base but keeping it at a flat fee. These were all excellent decisions made by the Minister of Finance and I think the member would certainly applaud them as being good initiatives.

In terms of the actual recommendations in the report, I would point to a couple of them. Recommendation No. 9, in terms of the Government of Canada promoting financial literacy through federal programs to reach Canadians directly such as employment insurance, old age security, CPP, universal child care benefits and that the provincial and territorial governments do the same.

A lot of these programs help very low-income Canadians. This recommendation is specifically saying that we need to get information, not only in terms of how to access the benefits but in terms of how best to use those benefits. These are actual issues that impact Canadians very directly.

I would encourage the member to review the recommendations in full because there are some initiatives that have a direct impact at the bread and butter level.

• (1745)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member made reference to the FCAC, which is a great agency that does provide a lot of the services regarding financial literacy, which this motion hopes to do. I recognize that right up front.

If we look at how things have changed, in good part because of technology, the Internet and so forth, from the days when I was in grade 12 where we would have had a simple economics course. Nowadays there is so much more, as the member has pointed out.

How does the member envision the motion would accommodate the sharing of information or getting it to the different stakeholders? I am looking specifically at the school boards, the provincial governments, possibly the municipal governments and the banking industry. In the member's mind, does the FCAC have a specific role to help facilitate that? How does the member envision that being facilitated?

Mr. James Rajotte: Madam Speaker, the motion actually builds on the excellent work that the FCAC has already done and, in fact, encourages it to do even more, which the FCAC is very much looking forward to doing.

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The member is absolutely right in terms of the impact of technology. It is a great benefit for people to do their banking at home or in their office but the decisions they make are all the more important because a single decision could have much more of an impact.

In terms of working with the school boards, the feeling there would be that the FCAC, which has a curriculum developed, would make that available to the provinces, territories and school boards and ask them to implement it as part of their curriculum. Obviously, we cannot mandate that but, from the FCAC's point of view, the provinces have been willing to adopt it.

As well, schools in my community of Edmonton—Leduc are actually bringing in people who have worked in the financial services as mentors and teachers in the classrooms and teaching the students about some of the practical lessons they have learned during their work experience.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Madam Speaker, we in the NDP believe that financial literacy is a vital component of any consumer protection regime in Canada. Certainly this motion contains some changes that would help protect Canadian consumers but these recommendations, if accepted, would still only constitute, in our opinion, a small first step.

It is our opinion that the government is not properly addressing consumer protection in general and financial literacy specifically. I am surprised that this motion is even before the House. If the government had a real interest in pursuing these goals, it would not take a private member's motion from a member of the governing party to call the government to action.

It is clear at this point that the entire process of the Minister of Finance implementing the financial literacy task force is more about spin rather than substance. Since the task force reported back to the minister, we have had two budgets presented to the House and multiple opportunities for stand-alone legislation but instead of focusing on real changes that could help average Canadians, the government has been focused on an agenda that only seems to help well connected insiders.

A clear example of the government's failure to understand the issue of consumer protection is the voluntary code of conduct that the Minister of Finance negotiated with the credit card issuers and the banks behind closed doors. The explicit purpose of the code completely ignores the needs of consumers and vital policies that would have protected consumers are simply non-existent.

An NDP government would ensure that all the rules governing credit cards are mandatory, therefore ensuring that issuers, merchants and consumers all know their rights and responsibilities and ensures that consumers are properly protected.

I will now look at each of the five core pillars of this task force's recommendations in turn. The first pillar is shared responsibility. While consumers certainly have a responsibility toward their own finances, it is important to note that a collective responsibility is not the same as equal responsibility. We can take the global recession that started in 2008. This was commonly blamed on people taking on subprime mortgages. While each individual is responsible for his or her mortgage, it is the framework created by government and

industry that allowed this to take place on a huge and destabilizing level.

Government and the wider industry have a greater responsibility because it is they that must maintain the financial system as a whole. That is not to say that consumers should act recklessly, but there needs to be safeguards for the system as a whole.

The second pillar is leadership and collaboration, namely, a national champion who is accountable to the Minister of Finance. It certainly makes sense to have someone who is accountable for these policies but the worry is that this simply adds another layer of bureaucracy to the system. The consumer protection regime in Canada is already spread between multiple agencies and departments, and adding this national champion could simply make the current system even more complex.

As well, this champion needs to be a champion for consumers, not a champion for the banking industry's desires. It would be all too easy to appoint a member of the banking community who then simply bows to the industry. Moreover, the government needs to show leadership. As well, trying to switch Canadians from guaranteed defined benefit pension plans to risky defined contribution plans hardly sends the right message to Canadians. Not only is this a bad message for Canadians, Canadians would be much better served in planning their personal finances if they accurately were able to predict their pension payments.

The third pillar is lifelong learning. With the continuing changes in investment vehicles and payment methods, which, in the industry committee, we are studying mobile payments, e-commerce and the differing requirements for Canadians at different points in their lives, lifelong learning is truly important. However, while the report talks of the foundations of lifelong learning, it misses the most important foundation and one that is missed too often, which is that without adequate numeracy and literacy skills, financial literacy education is often and, unfortunately, wasted.

●(1750)

Any long-term effort to improve financial literacy, lifelong learning needs to focus on improving the basic education of Canadian children, as well as ensuring Canadian adults have access to courses to improve their numeracy and literacy skills throughout their lives, otherwise, specific financial literacy curriculums are wasted. One of the things that we are also speaking to in the industry committee is that we have a need for financial literacy.

Then comes digital literacy. When those two combine, those who are being affected are those who do not necessarily have the education to understand. We need to ensure that both digital literacy and financial literacy come together on this.

The fourth pillar is delivery and promotion, focusing specifically on public awareness and on a single source website, which is echoed in the article (b) of the motion.

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Of course, ensuring that there is public awareness of financial literacy programs is an idea that we, as New Democrats, support. However, moving to a new emphasis website for financial literacy could well end up being another level of confusion for Canadians. As my hon. colleague mentioned earlier, there is already the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada website that contains a number of useful tools for consumers. The problem is simply that people do not know where to look when they have consumer or financial issues. Sometimes they go to the FCAC website, the Office of Consumer Affairs website or the *Canadian Consumer Handbook*.

Adding a financial literacy website on top of this patchwork may not actually help consumers find information. We need to ensure that consumers have all the information they need in one place, not separated by what can appear to average Canadians as somewhat arbitrary departmental jurisdictions.

The final pillar is accountability, specifically to Parliament through an annual report, as well as requiring financial institutions to make their financial commitments to financial literacy projects public. It, of course, makes sense to monitor the outcomes of such a program but, as always, we need to ensure that the monitoring techniques are objective and rigorous to ensure they are not open to political manipulation.

As we can see from these pillars, there are obviously a number of shortcomings if we accept this report as the final step in achieving financial literacy in Canada. However, the small step is better than doing nothing.

I can assure members that I, as the NDP consumer protection critic, will continue to hold the government to account on the issue of financial literacy. We need to be a world leader in this area. We will continue to push for a complete model of financial literacy, which includes ensuring that the specific needs of low-income Canadians are met, improving basic numeracy and literacy skills of all Canadians and providing a level of CPP to ensure that Canadians can properly plan for their futures.

The motion would not meet all of the requirements for a full financial literacy program but it is a start.

• (1755)

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is with pleasure that I rise this evening to speak in support of Motion No. 269, financial literacy, from the member for Edmonton—Leduc.

I commend the member for recognizing the importance of this issue as a priority for the federal government; however, I would say that it is somewhat inconsistent with the Conservatives' decision to, first of all, cancel all the agreements on early learning and child care with the provinces, because one of the most important areas of literacy happens to be establishing a strong foundation for learning at the very earliest stages. Early learning and child care are fundamental in that regard.

It is also inconsistent in some ways with the Conservatives' decision to cut funding for adult literacy programs, which was one of its first decisions as government.

That being the case, I do commend the hon. member for his recognition of the importance of financial literacy. I would note that

he is encouraging a great deal of work in areas that are often considered to be provincial jurisdiction.

I would say that encouraging greater co-operation with the provinces and territories and working together with the provinces and territories in areas of shared interest is a good approach. It in no way, shape or form diminishes our respect for provincial jurisdictions; in fact, I would say to the hon. member that he is demonstrating a level of pragmatism that is atypical of some of his brothers and colleagues when it comes to working co-operatively with the provincial governments.

The report does recommend that:

all provincial and territorial governments integrate financial literacy into the formal education system...

and

that all provincial and territorial governments provide financial literacy professional development opportunities for teachers

and

that the Government of Canada, in partnership with provincial and territorial governments, integrate a financial literacy component into the Canada Student Loans Program...

and

that the federal, provincial and territorial governments help Canadians maximize the financial benefit from government programs for which they are eligible...

I could go on about ensuring greater simplicity and clarity in the way programs are written and structured.

One helpful thing would be for the Conservatives to design their programs so that they would offer help to those Canadians in the greatest need. One constructive suggestion I have for the Conservatives is to look at some of the non-refundable tax credits they are offering for children's activities, for caregivers taking care of loved ones in the home and for volunteer firefighters.

Unfortunately, these tax credits are non-refundable; as such, they do not benefit the low-income Canadians who need the help the most. I would argue that it would be important, as part of financial literacy, for the government itself to have programs that are literate in terms of actually meeting the severe needs in many Canadian families. Clearly, simply understanding that lower-income families need help the most would instruct and hopefully educate the Conservatives as to the importance of making these benefits refundable.

Some of this work is already ongoing. As many members of the House know, the month of November is already financial literacy month. The site is sponsored by the Government of Canada's own financial consumer agency. There is a national calendar of events on the website.

For instance, on November 1 in my own riding of Kings—Hants, the workshop called “financially fit for the holidays” was held in Kentville at the Kings Regional Development Agency boardroom. This event was hosted by Credit Counselling Services of Atlantic Canada, a non-profit organization that provides confidential credit and debt repayment counselling services.

There is a growing need for credit counselling services across the country. The reality is that under the Conservative government, we have seen household debt soar to record highs; in fact, a new record was set in the last quarter: the average Canadian now owes \$1.51 for every \$1 of annual income.

● (1800)

A number of factors have contributed to this ballooning of household debt. Unemployment is part of the problem. A lot of Canadians have seen their full-time jobs disappear and be replaced with part-time work. According to Statistics Canada, there are now 578,500 fewer full-time jobs than there were in Canada in August 2008.

At the same time, the cost of living has gone up. Prices have gone up. It costs more for people to feed their families or heat their homes today, so many of them have turned to credit to try to make ends meet. They are worried today about their ability to pay their bills at current interest rates and terrified to think of what will happen to them as rates in the future will inevitably move up.

There is much discussion in Canada about rising housing prices. One of the reasons Canadians have taken on more debt is an overheated housing market in many Canadian cities and markets. One of the first actions taken by the current finance minister was to throw out some of the prudent rules for residential mortgages that were put in place by the previous Liberal government.

The Conservatives actually followed the lead of the Americans and introduced 40-year mortgages with zero down payment. I do not think that sent a very good message to Canadians, and it did not reflect sound principles of financial literacy from the government at that time. They have since done an almost complete reversal on those mortgage rules, and that is a good thing. They have scaled back the amortization period from 40 to 35 and then to 30 years, while reinstating the minimum 5% down payment that the Liberal government had in place.

Some international economic commentary suggests that Canada does have a housing bubble in certain markets. *The Economist* magazine has opined on this, and when Martin Wolf of the *Financial Times* of London was in Ottawa earlier this fall, he said that despite what Canada's finance officials are saying, in fact there is a statistical housing bubble in Canada.

There are issues around retirement. The TD Bank recently published a report entitled “Canada's Aging Household Debt Burden”. The report has some startling revelations. It states:

The bigger surprise is that older Canadians have been growing their debt-loads at a considerably faster rate than their younger counterparts.

In Canada, average debt loads in the past 10 years have increased twice as fast as income, but the rate is three times as fast for older Canadians, and many older Canadians simply cannot afford to retire. That is important.

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It is also important to recognize the leadership provided by some international organizations in this area. The World Economic Forum has set up a task force under their YGL, Young Global Leaders, organization entitled “Learn Money”. It is focused on promoting access to financial literacy programs around the world. In fact, I would very much like to speak to the hon. member for Edmonton—Leduc about this to see if there are ways that we can potentially incorporate some of those ideas here in Canada and plug in nationally to what the World Economic Forum is doing.

World Economic Forum YGL member John Hope Bryant serves as an adviser on financial literacy to the World Economic Forum's Global Agenda Council and has also served as vice-chairman of the U.S. President's Advisory Council on Financial Literacy. He argues that following the global economic crisis, financial literacy is the new civil rights issue in the United States, and has said that:

To not understand the language of money, financial literacy, and to not have a mainstream bank account (or credit union account) in the 21st century, clearly an economic age, is to be an economic slave.

In fact, he is saying that financial literacy is an issue of rights. Equality of opportunity is something we all take seriously as a rights issue, and clearly financial literacy and access to financial literacy education are fundamental to equality of opportunity. Whether it is helping Canadians to buy a house, manage their debt or save for retirement, there is a clear need for greater financial literacy in Canada.

We also know it is important that Canadians set aside enough to retire on, and there is a real question as to whether Canadians have been and are setting aside enough to retire on.

● (1805)

Even if they make that important step, where do they invest? It is a very complicated and complex investment decision. This is one of the reasons that opening up the CPP to a voluntary supplemental CPP would give Canadians access to a low-cost, well-diversified financial opportunity.

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Madam Speaker, I cannot disagree with my colleague from the Liberal Party more, but what I can agree with is this wonderful motion put forward by the member for Edmonton—Leduc.

I want to congratulate this wonderful member for his work, not only on this motion, but for all of the efforts he has made to promote financial literacy. His leadership on this very important file speaks to the record of Parliament over the last decade that he has been here.

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Since his election in 2000, he has become one of the most respected of all the parliamentarians here. He is one of the members to whom new members often go to for advice. He has served as the chair of the industry committee and is currently the chair of the finance committee. As chair of these committees, he has guided very important studies on a number of issues, ranging from supporting Canada's manufacturing sector to improving Canada's retirement system to ensuring oversight over the credit and debit system, and there is so much more. He has also been at the forefront, just recently, of a cross-country tour to conduct some pre-budget consultations. He has been very active in helping all committee members to listen to Canadians and to allow them to make sure their voices are being heard.

I know that I speak for all members of the finance committee, some of whom are here, when I extend our thanks to the chair of the finance committee for all that he has done this fall during those pre-budget consultations as we travelled across Canada.

We need not just take my word for it; here is what journalist Don Martin had to say about the member from Edmonton—Leduc: “[He] remains highly respected by all sides and is the best committee chair on the Hill”.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Mrs. Shelly Glover: I have to agree with journalist Don Martin on that one for sure.

Today the member's motion highlights an increasingly important issue for Canadians, financial literacy. With so many new financial products and choices out there today, including complex mortgage and loan forms, different retirement savings plans, the rise of online banking, online payment systems like PayPal, a growing number of debit and credit card options, and so much more, Canadians must ensure that they have the right tools and knowledge to make the best financial decisions for themselves and for their families. So many new and developing products can make it very difficult for Canadians not only to balance their online chequebooks but also to fully understand the risks, the fees, and the consequences of what is available. That is where strong financial literacy comes in as an important part of the solution.

I would like to share a somewhat lengthy commentary from the Canadian Taxpayers Federation that really speaks to the importance of this issue, not only at the individual level, but as part of the economy as a whole. I am going to quote this lengthy commentary:

Financial literacy is an important life skill. Canadians make financial decisions throughout their lives, many of which involve significant risks and rewards. Improving financial literacy helps consumers act knowledgeably and with confidence in managing their personal financial affairs. Informed consumer decision-making, in turn, contributes to the maintenance of a well-functioning and stable financial system and a stronger economy.

Simply put, the better one learns to manage one's own finances the better the economy can work as a whole. When people don't do a good job of managing their own finances it can have dire consequences.

Our Conservative government could not agree more. That is why we are supporting today's motion and its call to continue the work we have done to improve financial literacy here in Canada.

A big part of that work is something we started in 2009 as part of Canada's economic action plan, when we announced the establish-

ment of a task force on financial literacy to make recommendations to create a cohesive national strategy. Over the next few years that task force, headed by Don Stewart, went across Canada to hold open public hearings to hear first-hand from Canadians on this issue.

Thanks to the great feedback the task force received from that consultation, and other research it conducted, it produced a final report called “Canadians and Their Money: Building a brighter financial future”, which was publicly released this past February. That report outlined 30 key recommendations to improve the financial literacy of Canadians, including many referenced in today's motion. I would strongly encourage all Canadians watching at home to visit the website at www.financialliteracyincanada.com to learn more about the work that the task force did and to review the very detailed research it produced, including its report.

● (1810)

The task force report was extremely well received. For example, Social and Enterprise Development Innovations, which is a major Canadian non-profit organization dedicated to helping low income Canadians, applauded the report. It said:

We commend the federal government for recognizing the critical importance of financial literacy. We also commend the diligent and thorough work of the Task Force members, who engaged Canadians in every province and territory in building a much-needed national strategy on financial literacy. There is no better time for government to take the lead in helping Canadians increase their knowledge and skills to manage everyday finances.

As a first step, and as committed to in the next phase of Canada's economic action plan, we will move forward on the first ever financial literacy leader to promote and improve financial literacy in Canada. We are doing even more. We are also providing \$3 million a year in new funding to the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada to support financial literacy initiatives to help consumers make the best financial decisions to suit their and their families' particular needs.

I am going to take a moment to echo the comments made by the member for Edmonton—Leduc with regard to the FCAC. Its efforts have been tireless in trying to promote financial literacy, particularly among our youth. I commend the member for disclosing to Canadians how they can reach this information, how they can learn from the FCAC by visiting its website.

Today's motion encourages our government to stay focused on this important issue and implement the recommendations of the task force, and we appreciate that.

Only a few weeks ago, the Minister of Finance attended, along with the member for Edmonton—Leduc, a kickoff event for Financial Literacy Month. This is an initiative developed by the Financial Literacy Action Group, a group of seven non-profit organizations all devoted to working to improve financial literacy in communities across Canada. By supporting today's motion, especially by Parliament endorsing Financial Literacy Month, we are showing our appreciation for the group's work and efforts. This is something our American neighbours have already done through a bipartisan resolution unanimously passed in Congress, which hopefully we can replicate here in the House of Commons.

Our Conservative government has been working hard since 2006 to make financial services products more transparent and consumer friendly. We believe Canadians should not need a magnifying glass or a dictionary to read a credit card statement or application. They should not need a lawyer or an economist to understand them.

That is why we have taken measures like protecting consumers with new credit card rules that will require consent for credit limit increases, a minimum 21-day grace period on new purchases, full disclosure for consumers, and that will limit other anti-consumer business practices. We are banning negative option billing for financial products, and of course, shortening the cheque holding period.

In the next phase of Canada's economic action plan we want to build on that record with more consumer friendly measures, such as banning unsolicited credit card checks and moving to protect consumers of prepaid cards.

I thank the member for Edmonton—Leduc for today's motion and his commitment to improving financial literacy.

Other members across the way have stated very clearly how they intend to vote on this matter. I encourage members of the NDP and the Liberal Party to think very hard when they stand to vote, hopefully in favour of this motion.

The member for Edmonton—Leduc has worked hard on this measure for many years. This is a measure that Canadians across the country have asked for and need. As a mother of five, I can assure the House that I want my children to learn from this. I applaud the member for Edmonton—Leduc for moving this motion, for helping me to educate my children, and for helping other Canadians to educate their children. I hope the NDP and Liberal members will support that effort.

• (1815)

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be speaking for 10 minutes about a very interesting subject and a person whom I greatly respect. We can have good discussions and clear and differing opinions, but the member for Edmonton—Leduc is one of the people I most enjoy talking to. In terms of his knowledge, he holds a position for which he is eminently qualified.

He has never made a major error of interpretation. He has never put on airs. I watched him speaking with all the witnesses and he always spoke to them with kindness. He has all the personal and intellectual qualities to hold an important financial position. My

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opinion of him is the same as that of the member for Saint Boniface. For once we at least have something in common.

As for the member for Edmonton—Leduc's bill, it is a step in the right direction. We have no complaints. We must support his plan to ensure that all consumers and Canadians are better educated and better prepared to deal with all the new financial products, which are numerous and complex. I would remind members of the unfortunate commercial paper crisis. Even the CEO of Scotiabank said that he would not have anything to do with it because he was not familiar with the product. He did not have the qualifications to understand how these speculative instruments were structured. He said that they were so complex that he was ordering his bank not to touch them.

Think of all those who bought commercial paper and were told that the return was strong, that it was the best possible return. All these people suffered major losses. That is what needs to be corrected. We must ensure that people are not totally overwhelmed when they face important economic decisions related to their savings, their future, their pension, the division of matrimonial property, the management of inherited assets, not to mention the choice in comprehensive insurance. Currently, there are too many products available to Canadians, and they are also extremely complex. They are often written in a language that one must already be familiar with. One must be knowledgeable, be quite familiar with this industry and understand the legal terminology that is used.

The hon. member for Edmonton—Leduc tells us that people should be better prepared to face difficulties and complexities and that they should be sure to deal with individuals who will not rob them. Unfortunately, in recent years, we have seen many people put their trust in individuals and businesses that literally made fun of them and took all their savings. We must ensure that such events do not happen again.

While this initiative is a worthwhile first step, we should ensure that it is not the only step. There is a path to follow and that path must be followed to the very end. We must not take only that first step. We must go all the way and ensure that people not only understand what an insurance policy is all about, but also know what recourse they have against an insurance company that does not live up to its undertakings. People must also be able to protect themselves against practices that may be legal and honest but that may cost them much more than anticipated, in the case of credit cards.

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● (1820)

This is one of the things we should perhaps be aiming for so that people are better able to stand up to big organizations. Two cases in particular come to mind: Nortel and AbitibiBowater. People had put their savings in group pension funds. They thought everything was fine, everything was going well. Still, they did keep watch to some extent, but it was not enough to stop their pension funds from going bankrupt. Those people found themselves with extremely large reductions in their pension plan. When you lose 40% of your main source of income, it means not replacing windows that year or cancelling the little trip south you wanted to go on with the family. You have to give that up. Quite often, it is sad, because time passes and if people cannot do something that year, they will never do it again.

On that point, the member for Edmonton—Leduc does not go far enough. While, with the great honesty he is known for, he says openly and clearly what road we have to take, the motor in his car is not strong enough to get very far. That is our criticism of him and it is on that point that we have reservations.

On the essential points, we are pleased with his speech and we find it interesting. It was given by someone whose intellectual integrity cannot be questioned. But what we can stress, and we will do it constantly and strenuously, and we will not cease to point this out, is the fact that not only do people have to know the products they are dealing with, they also have to be well aware of what remedies they may have. We are asking that financial institutions improve the information about their products. They must also inform people with a certain degree of transparency. They have to tell people that they have had a lot of problems in this regard in the past. They lend to individuals who, too often, because of the risk, are pushed into bankruptcy later.

That information is important. Institutions give out unsolicited credit cards, especially to young people, or press people into getting credit cards. They are offered a credit card at the entrance to a department store. They are told to sign and they will be sent a credit card with a \$2,500 line of credit. That does not enable people to be well informed about all of the obligations they are incurring. There needs to be more oversight of the use of credit and financial planning for the future. People have to be more willing to receive that information, and it must be good information. We have to make sure that this information is accessible to everyone when they need it, that it is not just a matter of urging people to be customers, but also to be informed consumers.

I encourage people, and especially the member for Edmonton—Leduc, to keep going down this very fine road.

● (1825)

[English]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Madam Speaker, I wish to thank the House for the opportunity to speak to the private member's motion, Motion No. 269, which is sponsored by the member for Edmonton—Leduc.

Before speaking to today's motion, let me recognize the good work that the member has done. I do not think I have any other

quotes from Don Martin, but certainly as a member of Parliament since 2009 and in his current capacity as chair of the finance committee, we all respect the great leadership that he shows.

The motion before us today recommends that the government improve financial literacy in Canada by responding to the recommendations of the task force on financial literacy; creating, promoting and continuously upgrading a single source website for financial literacy to increase public awareness and ease access to information for Canadians; requiring federally regulated financial institutions to publicly disclose their contributions to financial literacy initiatives; ensuring the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada works with willing provinces and territories to promote financial literacy to youth through the educational system; and designating November as financial literacy month.

I have to stop for just a minute to say that when I was in Grade 9, I took an elective course in high school, which I remember to this day. It was optional Terry Toller consumer education. He taught us how to do our tax returns. He taught us about stocks. He taught us many things in that class in Grade 9. I am forever thankful for the advice and the educational program that I received. It is still a really important and valuable tool. So, to the degree that schools pick up this opportunity, it is going to be incredibly important.

Certainly, we live in an increasingly complex financial world of investment and credit products whose characteristics and risks have become much more difficult to comprehend. Financial products available to Canadians continue to rapidly expand and the complexity of such products can make it difficult for most of us to fully comprehend the risks, the fees, and the potential returns.

In Canada's economic action plan, or budget 2009, our Conservative government outlined key steps to protect consumers with regard to financial services and products.

First, the government enhanced consumer protection measures dealing with credit cards and mortgage insurance.

Second, and very important for the purposes of today's discussion, we established the task force on financial literacy to make recommendations to create a cohesive national strategy to improve financial literacy in Canada. The task force delivered its final report on February 9, 2011, entitled "Canadians and Their Money: Building a brighter financial future".

The report, which is available online for public viewing, outlined 30 recommendations to improve the financial literacy of Canadians. The report was very well-received by Canadians. Indeed, here is what the non-profit Canadian organization ABC Life Literacy had to say about the task force's report:

Every Canadian should have the literacy skills they need to live a fully engaged life. The Task Force has strongly encouraged that financial literacy be recognized as an important life skill to help Canadians thrive in workplaces, homes and communities.

The report, like our government, acknowledged that improving financial literacy helps consumers make knowledgeable and confident decisions toward achieving their financial goals.

At the same time, through Canada's economic action plan, our Conservative government has strengthened Canada's financial system and protected Canadians' hard-earned savings.

The Deputy Speaker: I regret to interrupt the hon. member. She will have six minutes when this motion returns on the order paper.

The time provided for the consideration of private members' business is now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

• (1830)

[Translation]

DISABILITY INSURANCE

Ms. Manon Perreault (Montcalm, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have tried to get answers from the government on the Canada pension plan disability program many times. The summative evaluation of the program released at the end of the summer revealed some worrisome facts.

According to the report, disabled persons are among the least fortunate in Canada. Compared to the rest of the Canadian population, they are more likely to be unemployed, they are more likely to live below the poverty line and they are often unable to pay for their basic needs such as clothing and food. Canada's food banks have recently reported that a growing number of people who receive disability benefits are using their services. This is truly unacceptable.

I would like to quote one particularly shocking passage:

The study finds that, compared to the 48% of all beneficiaries who started receiving CPPD pension between 1993 and 2004 and whose family income was below the Low Income Cut Off two years after CPPD started, the following subgroups were more likely to be in this situation: those who had mental disorders (55%), those who developed a disability before the age of 34 (68%), those who were separated or divorced (63%), and single parents (73%).

These figures are unacceptable.

The evaluation also gives some troubling statistics. More than half of the applications are denied. Half of the applicants denied still have no employment income after three years. This indicates that these people are truly unable to work because of their disability. They tried unsuccessfully to obtain support from this government and they now live without support, ignored and forgotten. Even worse, the appeal process for the old age security and Canada pension plan programs has become more complex and can take months, even years. The Office of the Commissioner of Review Tribunals is backlogged because it is receiving more and more review applications while the government continues to cut its budget.

What I find even more insulting is that this government also cancelled the long form census and the participation and activity limitation survey, the only survey that collected information about people living with functional limitations in Canada.

Adjournment Proceedings

The message that this government is sending to the disabled is clear: no help, no support, no improvement of programs. If it stops counting people living with functional limitations, how can this government create better policies? It is inconceivable that Canada, a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, is acting this way.

This report offered the government the opportunity to work at making real improvements to the Canada pension plan disability program. Unfortunately, the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development chose to set the report aside and make empty promises that it would do more research at a later time. We do not need any more studies. The facts laid out in the summative evaluation provide enough information to take action. We need to take action.

When will this government realize that there is a serious lack of support for people with functional limitations? And will it commit to improving the lives of more than 4 million Canadians?

[English]

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Montcalm for raising this important issue in regard to the Canada pension plan disability benefit.

First, I would like to point out that the province of Quebec has its own pension plan, known in French as Le Régime de rentes du Québec, which is very similar to the Canada pension plan and has a similar disability pension. If one of my colleague's constituents is deemed to be disabled, he or she would be entitled to benefits under the Quebec pension plan, not the Canada pension plan disability benefit.

That being said, let me point out that no government has done more to support Canadians with disabilities than our Conservative government. For example, we signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and we introduced the disability savings plan along with several other measures to help these people and their families.

The opposition parties have a shameful record of consistently voting against these things that help Canadians with disabilities. The NDP has actually voted against every single initiative introduced by our government to help those Canadians with disabilities. More than 300,000 Canadians have received disability benefits from the Canada pension plan.

As the hon. member knows, the CPP disability benefit provides basic earnings replacement to Canadian workers who have made sufficient contributions to the plan and cannot work regularly because of a severe or prolonged disability.

Ensuring that Canadians receive the benefits for which they are eligible is a priority for the Government of Canada. The CPP disability benefit is certainly the largest federal income security program for working age persons with disabilities and Canada's largest public disability insurance program.

Adjournment Proceedings

However, to fully understand what is out there to help Canadians with disabilities, we have to look at the bigger picture. The CPP disability benefit should not be considered in isolation. It is only one element of a broader social safety net that supports working age Canadians with disabilities.

Let me give hon. members a few examples of this broader safety net. EI sickness benefits provide temporary income support to ensure workers who need to take time off to recover from an illness, injury or quarantine before they return to work, but I have to stress that the Government of Canada is not the sole proprietor of Canada's social safety net. It is a shared responsibility with the provinces, territories and municipalities, all playing extremely important roles.

• (1835)

[Translation]

Ms. Manon Perreault: Madam Speaker, to begin, I would simply like to mention that I am well aware of the Quebec pension plan disability benefit. It exists in Quebec, but not across Canada.

The government has yet to implement an action plan to give effect to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Signing a document is not enough. We need to move forward and make concrete changes for people with disabilities.

My colleague mentioned that CPP disability benefit payments were not meant to be the sole source of income. Yet that is the case for 12% of recipients. I would like to quote from the evaluation: "CPPD accounted for over 80 percent of the income of beneficiaries with less than \$15,000 income in 2006." Let me say that again: \$15,000. Those figures are powerful. Saying that the CPPD is not meant to be the sole source of income does nothing to improve the situation.

Why is the government not focusing on real solutions instead of shirking its responsibilities?

[English]

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Madam Speaker, every province and territory has income support programs to help its residents with disabilities. For example, in Quebec there is the social solidarity program. This program provides financial assistance to people with very limited capacity for employment.

While municipalities do not provide income support, they offer a variety of services and programs to help their citizens with disabilities, programs such as accessibility, assisted housing and other such programs.

I should also mention the disability benefits offered through employer-sponsored group insurance plans and private coverage held by individuals.

We want to ensure that Canadians with disabilities have financial security and the opportunity to maximize their potential. We are happy to collaborate with other governments at all levels to make that possible.

SENIORS

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Speaker, as members know, an NDP motion supported by all parties in the House passed unanimously in June of this year. While I am

pleased that our initiative to end seniors' poverty did have support, I have profound concerns because the government has failed to take the NDP motion into account. It seems that the government is only willing to pay lip service to democracy and the seniors struggling to make ends meet.

The government agenda is clear: go full steam ahead and cut \$11 billion from programs and services Canadians rely upon; underfund important programs; and continue to cater to big business with unaffordable corporate tax cuts.

Seniors represent one of the fastest-growing populations in Canada today. The number of seniors in Canada is projected to increase from 4.2 million to 9.8 million between 2005 and 2036. With so many more seniors retiring in the years to come, we need to have social safety nets in place now to avoid dramatic increases in the rate of poverty in the future.

The Conservative government is clearly not preparing for the increased number of seniors in 2036 and those who are seniors today will not benefit as they should from the current budget. The government heralds its increase to the guaranteed income supplement, yet that money is nowhere near enough. The most recent budget would provide \$300 million per year for a small increase to the GIS, \$600 for single seniors and \$840 for couples, but this is less than half of what is needed and less than half of what New Democrats asked for it. It will not even come close to pulling every senior out of poverty.

The government's solution to seniors' poverty and access to resources is to offer tax breaks and trumpet the new horizons program. Both fall far short of what we really need, such as investment in home care, investment in pharmacare, increased access to resources, appropriate and affordable housing and investment in geriatric studies. Investments in our communities and in our families are what are needed, not corporate tax breaks.

Most seniors cannot afford to cash in on the promised tax cuts in the budgets because they do not earn enough. The people who are struggling the most, such as seniors, single mothers and those who have lost their jobs, are the people for whom the government should provide help. The government has an obligation to help. Tax credits are of little use to the unemployed, the working poor and seniors struggling on small pensions because they do not have enough income to qualify.

The new horizons program is the only investment the government is making in our seniors. While promotion of community programs is not a bad thing, there are so many more and much smarter ways to invest tax dollars to ensure our seniors are lifted out of poverty, have access to resources available to them and are able to choose to live where they want. Dignity in retirement should be a right, not a privilege.

The government should be prepared to act to lift seniors out of poverty, or will it continue to hide its disgraceful inaction behind meaningless tax breaks and small investments in new horizons?

● (1840)

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to respond to the member for London—Fanshawe on the issue of seniors' poverty.

Our government is vigilant on this issue and we truly appreciate the contributions of seniors in building our communities across Canada. A key Government of Canada priority is to help Canadians prepare for and achieve financial security in their later years. The most important support for making this happen is through a public pension system.

Let me underline that the Canada pension plan is a stable, well designed plan that is portable from province to province. The chief actuary of Canada has confirmed that the Canada pension plan is fully sustainable for generations to come. This year Canadians will receive an estimated \$72 billion in benefits through the Canada pension plan, old age security and the guaranteed income supplement.

Canada's strong public pension system has had great success in reducing poverty among seniors from a rate of 21% in 1980 to 5.2% in 2009. Three years ago we increased the GIS earnings exemption to \$3,500 from \$500. This allowed GIS recipients who chose to work to keep up to an additional \$1,500 in GIS benefits annually.

Budget 2011 also announced other measures to improve the financial security of our most vulnerable seniors and expand opportunities for older Canadians.

Beginning in July 2011, seniors with little or no income other than the OAS pension and the GIS have been receiving additional benefits of up to \$600 for single seniors and \$840 for couples per year, the most significant increase for the lowest income seniors in over 25 years. More than 680,000 low-income seniors will benefit from this increase.

OAS benefits, including the GIS, are adjusted accordingly in January, April, July and October to reflect changes in the cost of living as measured by the Consumer Price Index. That way seniors' purchasing power is protected.

The Old Age Security Act contains a guarantee that OAS benefits will not be reduced even when there is a decrease in the Consumer Price Index. In other words, the OAS benefits will never be decreased.

The Government of Canada is providing \$2.3 billion annually in tax relief to seniors and pensioners through pension income splitting and increasing the age credit.

Another initiative that is worth mentioning is our government's recognition of the role of informal caregivers as a complement to Canada's health care system. This is why we introduced the new family caregivers tax credit. It will help provide financial relief for caregivers of infirm, dependent relatives, spouses, common-law partners and children. This will benefit over 500,000 Canadians.

Adjournment Proceedings

This year we increased the new horizons for seniors program by \$10 million over the next two years, bringing this year's budget to \$45 million. We have also provided \$50 million over two years to extend the targeted initiative for older workers until 2013-14.

Since 2006, the Government of Canada has taken action on many issues important to seniors, whether that be providing \$400 million over two years under budget 2009 for the construction of housing units for low-income seniors, or establishing October 1 as National Seniors Day, or creating the National Seniors Council in 2007 to provide advice to the federal government on matters related to the well-being and quality of life for seniors and, finally, the federal elder abuse initiative which was successfully concluded in March 2011.

The Government of Canada has taken concrete steps to help seniors and will continue to help Canadians prepare for and achieve financial security in their later years.

● (1845)

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: Madam Speaker, the CPP is a good plan, but it needs to be reformed and we have seen none of that. In fact, the only response from the government is another private pension scheme.

The member opposite clearly did not hear my question or has chosen not to answer. Tax breaks are not enough. On this side of the House, we did not vote for those tax breaks because they would do nothing to actually lift seniors out of poverty.

Seniors are being forced to use food banks and their retirement savings, if any, have been depleted by this economic downturn. We need real action, not lip service, and we can afford to do it. We have the means available now. We can and we must make investments because no one deserves to be left behind.

The Conservatives talk, but they do not do. It is time to do something for the impoverished seniors of our country. There is no time left. We need action now.

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Madam Speaker, as I mentioned before, the government has made unprecedented gains with respect to helping seniors, whether that be increasing the GIS, the new horizons seniors program by \$10 million over the next two years, providing \$50 million over the next two years to extend the targeted initiative for older workers until 2013-14, \$400 million over two years in budget 2009 for housing for low-income senior and establishing a national seniors day and the federal elder abuse initiative. These are all things that this government has moved forward on to show its appreciation for seniors.

Adjournment Proceedings

The Government of Canada is taking concrete steps to help seniors, unlike the NDP that has voted against all of these initiatives again and again. We will continue to help Canadians prepare for and achieve financial security in their later years.

AIRLINE SAFETY

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have a chance to speak again on the issue of aviation safety.

On October 18, I asked the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities why we had not seen the government follow up on its commitment to bring on line a full complement of operational inspectors for our aviation industry.

The minister said that I was attacking the integrity of the Transport Canada workers. Nothing could be further from the truth. I was attacking the integrity of the bureaucracy in the government, which in May 2010 promised us, at the transport committee, that it would go through the process of hiring some 98 Transport Canada aviation operational inspectors who were missing at that time.

The sad state is it is worse. There are fewer aviation inspectors now than there were in May 2010. We have actually stepped backward a bit from that point.

I certainly did not attack the integrity of the inspectors, who are working flat out without a full staff. However, the government, which promised to do this and knew these problems were developing in aviation safety for small carriers across the country, in November 2009, when it delayed the implementation of SMS for small carriers, admitted we had a problem in safety in Canada among small carriers.

The crashes that have occurred across northern Canada in the past 12 months all appear to be operational in nature and appear to be the kinds of crashes that are associated with the operation of an aircraft, not mechanical in nature. It certainly sheds some light on what is happening inside our aviation system.

I was transport critic for this party in the last term. The transport critic before me put the same effort into aviation safety. We understand the importance of it to Canada and to the people who have to fly in small planes in conditions that are fast-changing across northern Canada, where climate change has made the weather systems very uncertain.

The situation now is we have 595 positions in aviation safety across the country and only 382 are filled. This is especially noted in the Prairies and northern regions and in the Atlantic regions. These are issues that affect people flying.

What has caused this issue? The issue has been exacerbated by the government, first, pushing the small carriers into SMS. Then when the government removed them from the SMS system, it did not really put back in the system of oversight that was used prior to that.

Now we have a situation where small carriers are not bound by SMS, yet they do not have the oversight, the on-the-ground inspections that small aircraft carriers across the country relied on to keep their safety standards to a high extent, and this is a bad situation.

The simple message for the government is to hire the inspectors, put the system back in order and give the Transport Canada workers the manpower they need to do the job for Canadians across the country.

• (1850)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Madam Speaker, Canada has one of the safest air transportation systems in the world, a fact recognized by the International Civil Aviation Organization. During the last decade we have seen a continual decline in the accident rate. In fact, we recently saw the total number of accidents decline to the lowest recorded figure in 10 years. Those are numbers we can be proud of.

Make no mistake though, Transport Canada officials take every accident seriously. Our thoughts go out to those affected by the tragic accidents in the north. We are supporting the Transportation Safety Board in getting to the bottom of those incidents.

To date, Transport Canada has taken several steps in response to the accidents. We have appointed a minister's observer to support the investigation and to keep the department informed of its progress. We are conducting a post-accident review to verify compliance with aviation safety regulations. We are evaluating if there are any issues that need immediate attention. We are reviewing data to determine if these accidents represent a trend when compared to past years.

I appreciate that now more than ever northern air carriers are faced with many unique challenges. Their services are crucial to the livelihood of many and they do excellent work every day to support their communities. Transport Canada has a robust safety program in support of these operators and verifies the safety of their operations.

The implication that our oversight program is weak is false. We dedicate more than 80% of civil aviation safety resources to oversight activities like inspections. Since 2007, our inspector position totals and staff have increased. What is more, our oversight model is based on a risk approach that allocates resources to the areas where they provide maximum safety benefit.

Our surveillance procedures include planned and unplanned inspections to verify compliance with aviation regulations. These inspections involve on-site interviews with staff and reviews of companies' safety practices. Today, in addition to traditional surveillance methods, our inspectors evaluate the safety systems within companies. Companies go beyond meeting traditional checks and balances and ensure that they tailor their safety and their risk management strategies to their operations.

This approach is a global standard and our work has put us ahead of the world. I stand proud that our experiences can be used as a model for other authorities around the world to follow as they implement their safety systems.

• (1855)

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Madam Speaker, certainly we can talk about Canada's aviation safety record. We can talk about SMS as being leading edge, but in reality, there is no other country that would institute SMS without proper oversight. This is the question that we have for the government. Why has this not happened?

Adjournment Proceedings

The Conservatives agreed in 2010 that they would replace and fully complement our operations inspectors across this country, but they have not done that. When it comes to the situation right now in terms of the safety of the travelling public, we can divide it into two groups. Statistically, if we take Canadian aviation as a whole, large carriers that have the internal ability to provide good safety systems are generally safe, but with respect to small carriers, the government agreed in 2009 to back off from SMS with small carriers, and that is where we need the oversight. I wish the government would go ahead with this in a good fashion.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Madam Speaker, Canada's aviation safety record is one of the best in the world. We recently saw the total number of incidents decline to the lowest recorded figure in 10 years. When an accident does happen we do take it seriously. Transport Canada is looking closely at the recent accidents that have taken

place to which the hon. member has alluded to determine if there are any issues that need to be addressed immediately. However, it is inappropriate to attack our aviation safety program when it has received international recognition as a world leader.

As a result, the department has continued to work with stakeholders in order to preserve the security and the safety of our system to protect Canadians and to keep our planes in the sky.

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:58 p.m.)

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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, November 16, 2011

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer



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(Table of Contents appears at back of this issue.)

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, November 16, 2011

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

• (1405)

[English]

The Speaker: It being Wednesday, we will now have the singing of the national anthem led by the hon. member for Winnipeg North.

[Members sang the national anthem]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[Translation]

PARTI QUÉBÉCOIS

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, 35 years ago yesterday, on November 15, 1976, the Parti Québécois took power in Quebec's National Assembly for the first time. During its first mandate, René Lévesque's party accomplished great things, particularly in terms of farmland protection legislation, the Charter of the French Language, automobile insurance and political party financing legislation.

It was also during this first mandate that the first referendum on Quebec sovereignty took place. Today, 35 years later, the dream of making Quebec a country is more relevant than ever. As we face this backward-thinking government that rejects Quebec values, Quebecers must realize that this is no longer our home and that it is time we built our own country.

On behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I want to commend the work accomplished by the Parti Québécois over the past 35 years.

* * *

[English]

BURLINGTON PERFORMING ARTS CENTRE

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to congratulate and thank the Burlington residents who have contributed to a fantastic new addition to the city's cultural mosaic. In the next few weeks we will be officially opening the Burlington Performing Arts Centre. The dream of a performing arts centre facility began in 1999 and the vision has come to fruition.

I want to recognize all who have taken a leadership role in this project, have contributed financially and have provided support by volunteering their time.

I also want to thank our Conservative government for its support through the cultural spaces program. The financial support made the difference in kick-starting this vital cultural infrastructure project in our community.

The Burlington Performing Arts Centre will deliver experiences that inspire for many generations to come.

I want to thank all involved for their vision, their commitment, and their contribution in making this dream come true.

* * *

LITTERLESS LUNCH CHALLENGE

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to announce the winner of my second annual litterless lunch challenge.

This year over 50 classes from Baker Drive, F.W. Howay, Lord Baden-Powell, Moody, Ranch Park, Rochester and Maillard Middle schools participated in the challenge during Waste Reduction Week.

This year's winning class went an astounding 100% litter-free for the entire week. Congratulations to Ms. MacKay's kindergarten-grade 1 class students from Baker Drive Elementary in Coquitlam. They are this year's litterless lunch winners.

My sincere thanks go to all the students, teachers and parents who helped make this challenge such a success. They did a great job. Special thanks go to the Green Team at Maillard Middle, which coordinated the entire school's participation in the challenge.

* * *

DIABETES

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, November is National Diabetes Awareness Month. This past Monday we celebrated World Diabetes Day, marking the birthday of Sir Frederick Banting who, along with Dr. Charles Best, co-discovered insulin 90 years ago.

Nearly every Canadian is touched in some way by diabetes. Diabetes is expected to have a continued widespread impact on Canadians in the coming years.

More than three million Canadians live with some form of diabetes, and this number is increasing by 3% to 5% every year. The greatest rise is in children five to nine years of age.

Statements by Members

Diabetes and its complications cost the Canadian economy more than \$17.4 billion a year.

The Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, JDRF, is the leading charitable funder and advocate of diabetes research in the world. It is working hard to find a cure for diabetes and its complications through the support of research.

I ask my colleagues in the House to join me in supporting JDRF and all diabetes agencies in having a very successful World Diabetes Month.

* * *

HUMAN RIGHTS

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today marks the 20th anniversary of the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, one of the more effective United Nations bodies that has addressed and redressed individual cases of political prisoners who have been arbitrarily arrested, illegally detained and unjustly imprisoned in violation of international human rights law.

Indeed, the UN working group has issued important rulings in the illegal detention of Burmese opposition leader and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Aung San Suu Kyi, and helped secure her release, and in the illegal detention and imprisonment of Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Liu Xiaobo.

I am now petitioning the working group in the case of the arbitrary arrest, detention and imprisonment of Egyptian blogger Maikel Nabil, one of the first political prisoners of the post-Mubarak era, who is now entering his 86th day of a hunger strike. We urgently seek his release and the UN working group can help us in this regard.

* * *

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring to the attention of the House an ongoing human rights crisis: the mass killing of a vulnerable native people in the Congo.

Since the 1960s, the countries and rebel groups surrounding the Congo River basin have displayed utter contempt for the lives of pygmies. To put it simply, pygmies are under threat of eradication. We know this due to the courageous work of intrepid Canadian journalist Geoffrey Clarfield.

Pygmies have endured massacres, the raping of their women and even cannibalism at the hands of their oppressors. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, rebel factions ridicule the United Nations because it has no legal means of stopping their inhumane crimes, so the slaughter of pygmies continues. Since 2003, an estimated 70,000 pygmies have been killed by tribal militias under eras the board campaigns. The remaining population hides in remote areas of the surrounding forests for safety, yet they are still in danger.

I call on the international community to help stop the slaughter of pygmies.

● (1410)

PALLIATIVE AND COMPASSIONATE CARE

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, almost two years ago a group of MPs from across party lines formed a non-partisan parliamentary group aimed at promoting awareness of deficiencies in Canada's palliative and compassionate care framework. The Parliamentary Committee on Palliative and Compassionate Care, which now has over 55 members and was co-chaired by me and the members for Kitchener—Conestoga and Guelph, conducted research and heard from Canadians throughout the country.

Tomorrow, November 17, the committee will release its landmark report outlining the findings and making recommendations on three main long-term health issues: palliative care, suicide prevention and elder abuse. Through our study we learned some troubling statistics. At least 10 Canadians die by suicide each day. Suicide is the leading cause of death among those between the ages of 10 and 24. We also discovered that only 16% to 30% of Canadians who need palliative care are able to access it. We also learned that as many as 10% of all seniors will experience some form of abuse in their lifetime.

I am proud of what the committee has accomplished in working across party lines to produce a substantial report that demonstrates that parliamentarians of all political stripes can work co-operatively for vulnerable Canadians.

* * *

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security heard testimony that the failed and costly long gun registry has no ability to prevent crime and there is no evidence that it has stopped a single crime or saved a single life. It does not prevent anyone from using a firearm for violence and it does not keep guns out of the hands of criminals.

A master instructor for the Canadian Firearms Safety Course testified that the registry misses the target of the criminal use of firearms. He said that instead, it targets millions of lawful, legitimate firearms owners.

The fact is the registry can do nothing to prevent criminals from obtaining or using firearms. Front-line police officers cannot risk their lives on the inaccurate, unverified information in the registry.

At the committee the Minister of Public Safety had to explain to the NDP that there is a difference between feeling safe and actually being safe. It is irresponsible to continue pouring tax dollars into the long gun registry because it feels like the right thing to do or the safe thing to do. The NDP proved again that it is unfit to lead.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to talk about my protecting freedom bill, an act to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act which would repeal section 13. Section 13 of the Canadian Human Rights Act erodes the fundamental building blocks upon which our society is built. These are not just the freedoms that every Canadian holds so dear, but also the freedoms that our society depends upon to grow and mature.

As George Washington described, "If freedom of speech is taken away, then dumb and silent we may be led like sheep to the slaughter". Freedom of speech is the bedrock upon which all other freedoms are built. Without the freedom of speech and expression, what good is the freedom of assembly or the freedom of religion? Freedom of speech is the only real tool that free and democratic societies have to fight bigotry and ignorance.

We must ensure that we protect and enhance our fundamental freedoms. This is not just an issue of blue or orange, left or right. This is an issue that affects all Canadians equally. I am asking all members to stand and support Bill C-304, my protecting freedom bill.

* * *

OCCUPY PROTEST MOVEMENT

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, protests are a vital part of our democracy. Citizens occupying public space are part of a proud tradition of non-violent civil disobedience. This is a practice that takes discipline, dedication and courage. It has been a constant presence in virtually all movements fighting for economic and social justice. Think about the civil rights movement led by Martin Luther King, the ending of apartheid in South Africa, the fall of the Berlin wall, the Arab spring. Embedded in these historic struggles for freedom and equality, acts of non-violent civil disobedience help nudge history in the right direction.

The occupy protests across Canada speak to the fact that something is fundamentally wrong when a few individuals and corporations control most of the wealth of nations. While some seek to trivialize and shut down the Toronto protests, at its core the occupy Toronto movement is a cry out for social justice, for greater democracy and an economic system that nurtures rather than distorts the true face of humanity.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP opposes creating jobs and are attacking Canada abroad. The New Democrats are at it again today, undermining the Canadian economy. They claim that Canadian jobs will be driven away to the U.S. if the Keystone XL pipeline goes through. As we have consistently said, the Keystone pipeline will create thousands of jobs and billions in economic growth on both sides of the border.

We are encouraged that an agreement has been reached to find a new route for the pipeline. I hope this news will mean the project can proceed. However, the delay highlights the need for Canada to ensure it opens export markets outside the United States, into Asia in particular.

Statements by Members

Canadians gave our Conservative government a strong mandate to stay focused on what matters to Canadians, jobs and economic growth. That is what we are doing.

* * *

• (1415)

MCGILL'S WOMEN IN HOUSE PROGRAM

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to welcome to Parliament the students participating in McGill's women in house program. Women in house has the noble mandate to foster an interest in political involvement in young women with the goal of improving female representation in government.

The women in house program began in 2001 as an attempt to break down the barriers women face in politics. Tomorrow female MPs and senators will mentor the young women who are sitting in the gallery today. The participants will hear first hand from female politicians about the daily realities of political life. This program makes politics accessible to young women and has inspired past participants, including myself, profoundly.

As a student, I was a participant and a coordinator of women in house and it motivated me to push the boundaries of what it meant to be a politician. I hope participants will take away from this eye-opening experience the desire to get involved and break down the barriers women face in politics.

* * *

DIRECT SELLING INDUSTRY

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada's direct selling industry injects over \$4.5 billion in total sales into the Canadian marketplace and provides earning opportunities for 900,000 of our constituents, including many of my own in Elgin—Middlesex—London.

Direct selling builds sales, management and interpersonal skills. Many direct sellers will apply these skills to their careers, their households and other business ventures.

More than 90% of Canada's direct sellers are women, embracing their entrepreneurial spirit and benefiting from the flexible and convenient opportunities that direct selling provides.

This evening the Direct Sellers Association of Canada will celebrate the Year of the Entrepreneur at its annual parliamentary reception. I encourage all members to attend and meet some of Canada's leading direct sellers, their companies and to learn more about this dynamic and important industry.

Oral Questions

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is an extraordinary moment for our planet. This month the world's seven billionth citizen was born into a population more aware than ever of the challenges of sustaining life on a crowded planet.

Between 1960 and 2000, the world's population doubled. During that same period, the world lost 25% of its land species, 28% of marine life and 29% of freshwater species. This is the fastest and greatest rate of biodiversity loss since the extinction of the dinosaurs.

People depend on nature for many things: a stable climate, clean air, fresh water, abundant food, tourism and incalculable economic benefits. To thrive as a species, we must work together to conserve nature.

I am honoured to chair the all party international conservation caucus, a non-partisan group with representation from all five parties. The ICC brings together scientists and environmental and conservation experts and provides them with a platform to present their research findings, to talk about conservation challenges and solutions and to help inform parliamentarians and others.

Together, we can make a difference.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP were down in DC yesterday, taking another run at the Canadian economy attacking good jobs here at home. The New Democrats cannot help siding with anti-Canadian special interests. They have a leadership candidate calling for a moratorium on oil sands development. The member for Burnaby—Douglas even claims Canada will lose jobs as the result of the Keystone XL pipeline.

I would like to remind the hon. member that the Keystone XL pipeline will create thousands of jobs and billions in economic growth on both sides of the border. The NDP opposes creating jobs and are attacking Canada abroad.

Canadians gave our Conservative government a strong mandate to stay focused on what matters to Canadians, jobs and economic growth. Our government will continue to promote Canada and the oil sands as a stable, secure and reliable source of energy for the world.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this week the official opposition has sent a delegation to Washington to do what the Conservatives have failed to do, to speak for all of Canada on energy security.

Instead of engaging Americans in a constructive dialogue, the Conservatives are trash-talking fellow Canadians and questioning their patriotism. However, Canadians are smarter than that. They remember a Conservative MP trashing Canada in the *Wall Street Journal* because Canadians did not support George Bush's war in Iraq. They also recall the same member telling Americans that "Canada is a Northern European welfare state in the worst sense of

the term". Who was that MP who was trash-talking Canada? It was the Prime Minister.

We will take no lessons from that side of the House on who is standing up for Canada. It is time the Conservatives end the attacks and the hypocrisy and instead get down to developing a clean energy strategy that works for all Canadians and provides clean energy jobs.

* * *

● (1420)

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the NDP has shown a lack of leadership and disunity on countless recent occasions, including fairness of the shipbuilding process, marketing freedom for western Canadian farmers and the ineffective and wasteful long gun registry. What is clear is the NDP does not stand up for northern Ontarians, so much so that the placeholder NDP leader has imposed more harsh disciplinary measures on the NDP MPs from Thunder Bay—Rainy River and Thunder Bay—Superior North for voting to end the useless long gun registry. She has removed the MP for Thunder Bay—Rainy River from the aboriginal affairs and northern development committee. I am going to miss his important contributions to this committee and so are his constituents.

We have heard from stakeholders across the region who have said that the NDP leader's disgraceful actions are an affront to the parliamentary system. Why does the leader of the NDP want to silence the voice of northern Canadians? It is a worrying example of why the incoherent, disunited NDP is not, and could never be, fit to govern.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, over the past few months, we have witnessed a protest movement on a scale never seen before. The occupy movement is denouncing economic disparity. People are fed up and they decided to act.

The parks might be cleaned up, people may have to go home, but the economic problems will not go away. Unemployment is too high, especially for youth. The income gap is growing.

Has the Prime Minister heard the cry for help?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): The real question, Mr. Speaker, is whether the NDP has heard any such cry.

The focus of Canadians is on jobs and economic growth. That is what this government is focused on. That is why Canada has one of the best records in the world on that.

This government does not go to another country to argue against job creation in Canada, but that is what the NDP did, a party that is totally unfit to govern or to even comment on the creation of jobs.

[Translation]

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister must understand that the protesters are only the tip of the iceberg. Whether it is in Calgary, Toronto, Montreal or elsewhere, these people represent the general disgust that is spreading through the middle class.

Last month we lost 72,000 full-time jobs. The new jobs the government has been bragging about are temporary, casual, part-time or low-paying jobs. Even CIBC has said that the jobs created in the past seven months have all been poorly paid.

Does the Prime Minister realize that?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when real Canadians face challenges, they roll up their sleeves and get to work. That is what our industries are doing, despite the NDP's extreme opposition. The NDP goes to the United States to oppose the creation of jobs in Canada. That party is not fit to govern this country.

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, our party is doing the job that the Prime Minister should be doing.

While the financial community is playing roulette with people's savings and major corporations are raking in huge profits and getting tax cuts, real people are paying the price. The quality of jobs is going down and minimum-wage jobs are on the rise. In fact, wages are not keeping up with the cost of living. Real wages are going down, the purchasing power of families is going down and people are having a hard time making ends meet.

Why is the Prime Minister turning a blind eye to this economic reality?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada has one of the best records in the western world on job creation and support for our families. That is our government's clear record, because we remain focused on the economy.

[English]

That is totally different from the NDP. The fact that the NDP has focused on the occupy protest rather than on job creation tells us everything we need to know about the NDP. It is a party that is totally unfit to govern or to even comment on job creation.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would remind the Prime Minister that last month, on his watch, Canada lost 72,000 full-time jobs.

Since May 2008, the Canadian economy has created barely 200,000 net jobs—jobs that pay a lot less and are more precarious. Over the same period, 450,000 more people entered the job market.

Therefore, some 250,000 more jobs are needed, just to return to the same level.

Why is the Prime Minister denying the evidence? Why is he not making job creation a priority? Why is he leaving so many Canadian families behind?

[English]

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, if I can quote the Minister of Foreign Affairs, that is another fact free question. Most every comment in that question was false. I would like the member to tell that to over 600,000 Canadians who are working now who were not working at the end of the recession.

Ninety per cent of those jobs are full-time jobs, and 81% of those are in the private sector. That is a good news story. I do not know how he could make it such a negative story.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is sad. Canadians are struggling with lost jobs and the Conservatives are struggling with bogus job numbers.

We have seen, under this government, that the jobs that are created are low wage jobs. One in five Canadian men and one in three Canadian women now make less than two-thirds of the average wage, and the jobs they get pay \$10,000 less than the jobs the Conservatives lost.

Canadians cannot get back to work until the government does its job. Why does the government not do its job so Canadians can get back to work with family-sustaining jobs, with decent wage jobs, with the kind of jobs that build our economy in this country?

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can say what a \$10 billion tax hike would do to jobs. That is what the NDP wants to load on us. It was in its campaign platform. It wants to download that onto Canadians.

That would kill jobs. That would be the worst thing that Canadians could see and it would kill jobs. The 600,000 more Canadians who are working than were working in July 2009 would not appreciate that.

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a number of our allies are now reviewing the F-35 contract, which means that the total number ordered may be lower than anticipated. The Americans themselves are facing a great challenge with this. Now we hear that the production of the plane may in fact be delayed.

I ask the Prime Minister, exactly what will it take to convince the government that this contract is one that needs to be reviewed by the Canadian government? We need to have a competition to produce the best possible price for the greatest possible Canadian security.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was the previous government that ran a competition to select a company internationally to create the next generation fighter plane.

Oral Questions

The current CF-18s will begin to come to the end of their useful life in this decade. That is why we are proceeding with the purchase of new airplanes, with great support by the way from not just the men and women in uniform but also the industry.

I have heard no concrete suggestion on how we would proceed from the Liberal Party.

[Translation]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will say it again: Canada needs a new, real competition to meet our needs here in Canada, to meet the needs of the Canadian industry and to meet our security needs. That is what must be done. We need to look at how the facts are changing. The government is taking an ideological approach that makes no sense. That is the Liberal Party of Canada's concrete suggestion.

• (1430)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, procuring the F-35s is supported not only by the Canadian Forces, but also by the aerospace industry in Canada, particularly in Quebec. The proposal to kill this industry makes no sense. That is why the Liberal Party is getting the cold shoulder.

* * *

[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government will yet come to the conclusion that it has to have an open competition. That is an inevitable fact of life because the option that it is putting forward, the one it is going with, makes no sense.

Another island of profligacy which seems to dominate the life of the Conservative Party is in corrections. Spending directly on care and custody has gone from \$1.1 billion to \$2.1 billion in the last five years. That is a 100% increase in direct spending on care and custody.

What will it take for the government to realize that we cannot have islands of profligacy in defence and corrections if we are seriously asking Canadians to pull in their belts—

The Speaker: The right hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always interesting to observe the priorities of the Liberal Party. The only spending it opposes is anything to do with cracking down on criminals or supporting our men and women in uniform.

For obvious reasons, our priorities on this side are very different. We have a responsibility to our men and women in uniform to give them the best equipment they deserve and we have a responsibility to keep dangerous and repeat offenders off the streets.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the failure on Keystone shows how this out-of-touch government is mishandling our key trading partnerships.

The Americans understand that protecting the economy and the environment go hand in hand, yet our government has stuck its head in the oil sands, exporting unrefined bitumen and killing thousands of Canadian jobs.

Thankfully for Canadians, New Democrat MPs have flown to Washington to help explain that most Canadians disagree with the Conservatives.

When will the Conservatives start putting Canadian jobs and the environment first?

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in a bizarre anti-trade mission the NDP has travelled to Washington to fight against the creation of Canadian jobs. Apparently, those NDP members forgot to ask for permission from their union bosses. Today, Buzz Hargrove supported the Keystone project because it would generate thousands of jobs. The NDP is totally out of touch with ordinary Canadians and economic reality. Send in the clowns.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as the opposition leader, the Prime Minister appeared on Fox News and criticized the Canadian government for refusing to go to Iraq.

Conservatives know what our MPs are doing in Washington. What the Conservatives failed to do was stand up for Canadian jobs and the environment.

Like Americans with Keystone, first nations communities in B.C. do not want the risky Enbridge and TMX pipelines going through their communities.

When will the Conservatives stop playing oil sands cheerleader and agree to consult and protect British Columbian communities?

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are extremely fortunate to have the third largest proven oil reserves in the world. This project will generate hundreds of thousands of jobs, trillions of dollars in economic activity and revenue to support social services, including education and health.

Are the NDP members so star-struck by jet-setting Hollywood stars that they are blind to the needs of Canadian workers and their families?

[Translation]

Ms. Ève Péclet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this government does not understand that in the 21st century, jobs and the environment go hand in hand. That is why two of my colleagues are currently in Washington to pick up the government's slack. The United States has decided to allow more time for studying the Keystone pipeline project because it is concerned about the environmental impact. However, on this side of the border, the Conservatives continue to move forward with blinders on.

Will this government follow the example of our neighbours to the South and take the time to truly assess the environmental and economic impact of the Keystone pipeline project?

• (1435)

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Keystone XL will create tens of thousands of jobs and generate billions of dollars in economic activity. These revenues will help fund important social services such as health care and education. Nonetheless, the NDP has gone to the United States, determined to hinder this project and job prospects for Canadians. The NDP position would be laughable if it were not so harmful to Canada's national interests.

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleagues are in Washington to tell Americans that the majority of Canadians want natural resources to be developed in a sustainable manner.

Both the environment and thousands of jobs are at risk. Several refineries have already closed their doors in Montreal East resulting in the loss of thousands of jobs, especially in my riding. The facts are there and speak for themselves. Now the government wants to export thousands of jobs outside the country. That is exactly what will happen with the Keystone project.

When will this government prepare a plan for the sustainable development of Canadian resources and the accompanying jobs?

[English]

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP seems oblivious to the facts and does not listen very well either.

This project would generate hundreds of thousands of Canadian jobs and millions of dollars in economic activity. Does the NDP care at all about Canadian workers and their families? Is it so ideologically driven that it is blind to the interests of Canadians?

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about families. Yesterday, the minister accused me of using scare tactics, but the fact is that Montreal families are worried that the Champlain Bridge might collapse. Reports tell of crumbling concrete and eroding steel.

Yesterday, I asked the minister if he had a plan for Montrealers if their bridge is shut down while they wait for a new one. He did not have an answer. I will ask again today.

If the Champlain Bridge has to close, what is the government going to do about it?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the difference between them and us is that they want to close the bridge and we want to keep it open and work on it to keep it safe. That is the only difference.

Those members do not care about the population. They care about political ideas. We are doing the job.

[Translation]

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government's plan for the new Champlain Bridge

Oral Questions

may cause more problems than it will solve. Montrealers are seriously considering avoiding the new bridge and using the others. Access to the south shore will be even more congested. Is that the government's solution to traffic problems?

When will the government present a plan that truly meets the needs of Montrealers?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as usual this member is mixing up jurisdictions. He now wants us, rather than the City of Montreal, to make plans for Montrealers. The federal government owns two bridges and 50% of another bridge in the Montreal area. We will manage what falls under our jurisdiction and let the province manage what falls under its jurisdiction, which he does not understand. He always wants to mix everything up. We are working with facts and not with hypotheses about what will happen in 10 years. We will build a new bridge and we are investing in the existing bridge to make it safer.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government wants to engage in free trade talks with countries that are clearly opposed to supply management. Producers in Quebec and Ontario want to keep this system, which allows family farms to survive.

Will this government admit that it is threatening producers' livelihoods by going ahead with these talks? Will the government recognize that it wants to use supply management as a bargaining tool?

• (1440)

[English]

Hon. Ed Fast (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government will continue to defend and promote Canada's interests in every sector of our economy, including supply management.

After a review of the framework that was released on Saturday by the trans-Pacific partnership, TPP, partners, we determined that Canada can lead and even exceed the ambition set out in that framework.

All countries approach negotiations with a view to protecting their interests. Canada's approach to the TPP will not be any different from our free trade negotiations with the European Union.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Mr. Speaker, once again, the government is saying one thing and doing the opposite. The government cannot be trusted.

Last week, the Minister of International Trade said that it was not in Canada's interest to participate in negotiations to create a trans-Pacific free trade zone. However, the next day, the Prime Minister himself voiced his support for these negotiations. Either the government is improvising or it is giving in to pressure. And, it is the dairy and poultry producers who may have to pay the price.

Oral Questions

Can the government finally set the record straight? Is it going to stand up for Canadian producers, yes or no?

[English]

Hon. Ed Fast (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have always been clear. We would only join negotiations if it were in the best interests of Canadians.

We are standing up for supply management. Unlike the NDP, we do our due diligence first.

Last Saturday we reviewed the negotiation framework for the trans-Pacific partnership and are now confident that Canada can meet that ambition and even exceed it. As such, we formally expressed our willingness to join the TPP negotiations. We know that increasing Canada's ties to the Asia-Pacific countries will bring more jobs and opportunities and greater prosperity to hard-working Canadians in every region of our country.

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CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is another about-face between a minister and the Prime Minister.

Wheat farmers saw it last spring when the Minister of Agriculture told them that he would not dismantle the Wheat Board without a vote by prairie farmers. Six months later, there was no vote.

Now the government wants dairy and poultry farmers to just "trust it".

Farming families are asking for a simple answer to a simple question: Is the government dismantling supply management, yes or no?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we value the supply management sector in this country. We had it in our campaign platform, unlike the NDP. We brought it forward in a throne speech, which those members voted against.

Yes, we are with the supply management sector.

* * *

SERVICE CANADA

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 40,000 more Canadians were unemployed this month than last but the minister remains committed to cutting 600 call centre jobs at the EI centres. Statistics show that only 32% of incoming calls are being answered within required times and 51%, over half, are being hung up on.

It is time for the Prime Minister to get involved in this file. Will he walk over and tell his minister to fix this mess? He should walk over, because if he calls he will probably not get through.

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what we are doing is overhauling all of our service delivery programs so that we can modernize them to provide better service to Canadians. There are numerous ways that Canadians looking for help from Service Canada can access it. One is through the call centres, which have a

much better record than what the member purports, but they can also click on the Internet and they can show up in person, because all of our front-line services are still there to serve Canadians.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in 2006 Monte Solberg was minister for Service Canada, and he went to cut the jobs for summer students. The opposition made such a fuss that the prime minister went over and told Monte, "Fix this, Monte". To his credit, he had that program put back in.

Canadian unemployed are hurting. They are missing monthly payments. They are going six weeks without cheques. They are running their households on maxed-out credit cards. Will he walk over and tell his minister, "Fix this mess"?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are making every effort to improve the service that we provide to Canadians. The way we are doing it is through automation. That is the best way to get fast service. We are consolidating our EI processes to make them more efficient as well, because Canadians deserve their assistance quickly. That is why we are working to make the system more efficient, more effective and more affordable.

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SENIORS

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the junior finance minister falsely claimed this party voted against an extension of the time to convert RRSPs to RRIFs during our recent recession. The fact is we suggested this measure, we supported this measure, and I voted for this measure.

It is sad to see this Conservative government shamelessly misleading the House to hide the fact that it is refusing to help these seniors. Why will they not give seniors more time to convert their RRSPs into RRIFs so that they can at least try to rebuild their value?

• (1445)

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals vote against so much that it is hard to keep track of what they vote for and what they vote against. There is very little that we have put forward that they have voted in favour of. We actually have extended, from 69 to 71, the age for seniors to roll their RRSPs into RRIFs.

I will say what I know is factually correct: they voted against the tax-free savings account. This measure has been tremendously successful. It is an opportunity for people to save, tax protected, for their retirement, and I am quite sure that they voted against that. In fact, they may stand up and admit it.

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Associate Minister of National Defence said that our allies understand the importance of the F-35 program. Apparently, he did not get their memos. The Americans are on the verge of withdrawing from the program entirely. Norway, Australia and the United Kingdom are also considering withdrawing, and the Netherlands has already backed out. It is quite clear that the government is not getting the message from our allies.

Will the government finally launch a transparent bidding process for a new plane?

[English]

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is engaging in fearmongering about the importance of the F-35 program, a program that is critical to maintaining Canada's sovereignty, supporting our military men and women and creating aerospace jobs for Canadians. We are on track, we are on time and we are staying with the program.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): If the government would show leadership and demand that economic spinoff clauses be included in a bidding process for fighter jets, the Canadian industry would benefit from more jobs anyway. The government is saying that the price of the F-35s will drop once the factories making the planes are running full throttle, but that may never happen because we will likely be the only ones ordering these planes.

Why is this government so bent on wasting taxpayers' money on planes that no one wants? The F-35 program has stalled; does the government have a plan B for replacing our CF-18s?

[English]

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, not only is there a plan B, but there is a plan A to ensure that we acquire the best possible equipment for our men and women. Moreover, we are one of nine international nations that are part of this program. It was the Liberal government of the day that got us involved in this to begin with.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the point is that plan A is not working here. Yesterday the associate minister of defence claimed again that our allies "... understand the importance of this program". Apparently, Mr. Speaker, he missed the memo. Let me share the news: Israel, Australia, Turkey, and Norway are all reconsidering their orders, and the Americans are talking about pulling out entirely. The Conservatives insist everything is fine.

The F-35 purchase has become a fiasco. When will the government admit its expensive mistake and put this boondoggle of a contract out to public tender?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government and our closest military allies understand the importance of this program to the protection of our sovereignty. Canada is not the only country among our closest allies

Oral Questions

warning critics of the damage their reckless plans would cause to our military and aerospace workers.

I am pleased that Secretary Panetta has taken a similar action to warn Congress of the reckless short-sighted implications such a proposal could have. If our opposition members had their way, they would cancel the equipment our air force agrees is the best it needs to do its job in safety and to key effect.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is the same line again. To the associate minister and the Prime Minister, living in denial is a dangerously expensive and irresponsible approach to military procurement.

The facts here are simple. The economics are simple. The government says the F-35 price tag will go down when the planes are in full production, but when we are the only ones ordering them, that price can only skyrocket.

If the Americans pull out of the F-35 program, this plane is unaffordable, so what is the government's backup plan? Why is the government hell-bent on blowing the budget on a plane that everyone else is walking away—

• (1450)

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of National Defence.

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is absolutely untrue. There is no indication that anybody is walking away from the F-35 program. The aircraft are coming off the production line. Pilots are flying them. They are being delivered to countries. Our program is on track and on time, and we are staying with it.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Joe Daniel (Don Valley East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, week after week, month after month, Syria's brutal regime is cracking down on innocent civilians by killing them in cold blood. We know that Canada has been an active and vocal opponent of these atrocities.

Will the Minister of Foreign Affairs please reiterate to the House Canada's position regarding actions of the Assad regime against the Syrian people?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the campaign of violence and terror against the Syrian people must end. This government has called for President Assad to step down. Our government has taken decisive action by imposing very tough sanctions on the regime and on the key actors who are causing the violence. Canada stands with the Syrian people in their time of need.

While I have this opportunity, I would like to strongly advise any Canadians currently in Syria to leave through commercial options while they are still available.

Oral Questions

CAMPAIGN FINANCING

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week the Conservative Party of Canada pled guilty to violating the Canada Elections Act, exceeding spending limits and improper reporting. It was charged the maximum fine allowed under the law. As a result of the Conservative scheme, 17 Conservative riding associations received illegitimate rebate money, and Elections Canada has outlined which Conservative riding associations benefited from this illegal scheme.

My question is for the Receiver General. What steps has the government taken to recoup this ill-gotten money from the Conservative Party of Canada?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thought the hon. member was rising today to apologize on behalf of the NDP. Just last week the NDP had to admit that it broke the Canadian election law, that it violated the law in attempting to use the power of the political donation tax credit in order to fund a third party organization. It did so in violation of the law. It has now had to admit it.

On this side of the House, every single Conservative accused of wrongdoing has now been cleared. We are very pleased with the outcome. We will continue to stand by the fact that we followed all the rules.

[Translation]

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is incredible. They are unable to even differentiate between a donation made following the death of our leader and an illegal procedure to get around the law. Is that possible? Taxpayers' money was given to the Conservative Party illegally. Elections Canada has already indicated which riding associations received illegal money and how much they received. The Conservatives have admitted that they violated the act. They know how much illegal money they took.

What are they waiting for? Are they going to do what needs to be done and reimburse the taxpayers?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member forgot to mention that it is his party that admitted to violating the Canada Elections Act. They have admitted it. The NDP members should rise in the House of Commons and apologize to all Canadians.

Every member of our party accused of wrongdoing has now been cleared. We are proud of this outcome. We followed all the rules and we will continue to do so.

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PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY TO THE PRIME MINISTER

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Peterborough clearly said that he planned on interfering with the work of the Federal Court and the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics in the CBC matter. He has put pressure to bring a judge to the committee and—

surprise, surprise—he was mocked. Now he is asking for access to the full documents, which the parliamentary law clerk has deemed unlawful.

Does the government support this member's attack on the justice system?

• (1455)

[English]

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what we support, believe in and applaud is the member for Peterborough's efforts to hold CBC accountable for the money it gets from taxpayers.

The committee the member is referencing can decide its own business, what witnesses to call and what documents to ask for.

What the member for Peterborough is simply doing is what he promised his constituents he would do, which is to stand up for value for taxpayers' dollars. Unlike the member for Timmins—James Bay, who promised he would stand up in the House of Commons and vote against the long gun registry, he has a record of standing up for his constituents; the member opposite has a record of abandoning his.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I do not know if the duck hunter across the way heard the question or not, because I do not know what the heritage minister is doing standing and responding to a question about undermining parliamentary convention. Maybe it is his desire to attack the CBC. Maybe he is just excited and wants to talk about guns. The other day he got up about the Wheat Board.

However, he is not answering the fundamental question. Does the government support the efforts by the member for Peterborough to intervene in a direct court action when the parliamentary clerk says it is unlawful—yes or no?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, the committee can decide its own business and its own witnesses all at once.

The member opposite raised three issues.

He talked about the Wheat Board. We said what we would do in the campaign; we delivered.

He talked about the gun registry. We said what we would do in the campaign and we delivered.

With regard to accountability for the CBC, we said in the campaign that we would demand accountability. We are delivering for the member for Peterborough.

We have a record of standing up, making promises to Canadians, fulfilling those promises, and getting re-elected.

The member made promises to his constituents and abandoned them. He should be ashamed of himself.

[Translation]

JUSTICE

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party of Canada supports the amendments to Bill C-10 proposed by the Government of Quebec. The federal government may well have jurisdiction to legislate on criminal matters, but Quebec and the other provinces manage the administration of justice and are stuck dealing with the consequences. The government did not even bother to come up with a proper French version.

My question for the Minister of Justice is simple. Will he agree to allow Quebec, by decree, to opt out of the requirement to publish the identity of a minor? They call this lasting security. Will he agree, yes or no?

Mr. Robert Goguen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians gave us a strong mandate to keep our streets and communities safe, and that is what we are doing. The provinces have given us a number of recommendations in the past. We took them into consideration when we created this bill. We have made changes that were requested by Quebec and the other provinces, regarding pretrial detention, adult sentences, and deferred custody and supervision under order. We will protect Canadians and will continue to protect them, unlike the Liberal Party.

* * *

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for decades Canadian delegations to international conferences have been understood to represent Canada, not just the governing party. The Conservative government broke this tradition in 2006 for COP 12 in Nairobi. Opposition MPs were again included at COP 14 at Poznan.

Since the government is again refusing to include opposition MPs, we are travelling on our own.

Will the government commit today to providing access for us to Canada's meetings?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I conveyed a respectful message to my critics across the floor some weeks ago, explaining that I would not, and we would not, be taking a large entourage to Durban.

I would also remind my colleague that pairing practices that were relevant during our previous minority government are no longer appropriate now that Canadians have elected a strong, stable, environmentally sensitive Conservative government.

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TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the CRTC has now rejected an attempt by large Internet companies to enforce wholesale usage-based billing.

That is good news for Canadians using smaller ISPs, but it does nothing to protect customers of other Internet providers, leaving 94% of consumers behind.

Oral Questions

When will the Conservatives finally present a real plan for digital issues that protects all Canadian consumers from being ripped off?

• (1500)

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, at our government's request and thanks to the hard work of the President of the Treasury Board at the time, the CRTC has re-examined the issue of usage-based billing to ensure fairness for consumers of small Internet service providers.

Canadians have been very clear in expressing concern with earlier UBB decisions. Let me clear. Our government's policy will always be to encourage competition, increase consumer choice and minimize regulation.

This is the plan. We have a vision, not those guys.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what we understand is that the government is turning its back on the majority of Internet users. Indeed, nearly all Canadians get their Internet service from the big suppliers. Yesterday's decision does absolutely nothing for them. Some 94% of Internet users have been abandoned by this government, which is once again protecting its friends in large corporations rather than ordinary Canadians.

Will this government finally admit that affordable Internet access has become a basic need for everyone?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, it is very simple. We need to increase competition and choice for consumers and reduce regulation. That is the plan; that is our vision.

We introduced the Broadband Canada program in 2010. The goal of that program is to reach 98% of Canada's vast territory. What did those folks do? They voted against it. And just yesterday, the member for Timmins—James Bay said that it was a great day for Canadians, because of the CRTC's decision. So, frankly, Mr. Speaker, if you want inconsistency, look no further than across the floor.

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[English]

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians across the country are increasingly concerned that section 13 of the Canadian Human Rights Act infringes upon our most important human right, namely the freedom of expression.

This is the reason why I was pleased to introduce Bill C-304, which will repeal section 13.

Oral Questions

My bill has the wide-ranging support of journalists, civil libertarians and the Muslim Canadian Congress. People from all points of the political spectrum agree that this part of Canada's Human Rights Act needs to be repealed.

Can the Minister of Justice please inform this House of the government's position on Bill C-304, protecting freedom?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to congratulate the hon. member for Westlock—St. Paul for introducing this legislation, and for his commitment to the promotion and protection of free speech among all Canadians.

Our government believes that section 13 is not an appropriate or effective means for combatting hate propaganda. We believe the Criminal Code is the best vehicle to prosecute these crimes.

Therefore, I urge all members to support Bill C-304 and our government's forthcoming amendments to strengthen the hate provisions of the Criminal Code. I say to the opposition, get on side with the media. *Maclean's* magazine, the *National Post* and even the *Toronto Star* say this section should go.

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IRAN

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as per the evidence, the Iranian regime has accelerated its nuclear weaponization program, continued its state sponsorship of terrorism and genocidal incitement, and intensified its massive domestic repression.

Will the government sanction the Central Bank of Iran, put the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps on the terrorist list, this epicentre of the Iranian threats, sanction the Iranian crude oil sector and those companies that trade with IRGC entities, and expand the orbit of sanctions against those entities and individuals engaged in the massive assault on human rights in Iran?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Mount Royal for his question and his work in this regard.

Canada today has the toughest sanctions against the Iranian regime in the world.

We are incredibly concerned by the IEA report on its nuclear weaponization program. We are tremendously concerned about the Saudi assassination plot. We are tremendously concerned by the abysmal and terrible record on human rights.

We will continue to work with our allies to ensure that we continue to have the toughest sanctions on this despicable regime.

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ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since 2004 Health Canada has reported that levels of trihalomethane in Fort McKay First Nation drinking water have exceeded federal guidelines 87% of the time.

Exposure to this substance can cause low birth weight, miscarriage, birth defects and some forms of cancer.

Residents are already suffering severe skin rashes. How many more first nation children and elders must suffer before the government finally provides a safe source of drinking water?

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have made major investments in our water action plan for first nations since 2006. It is ongoing. We have done a national assessment, so we know where to set our priorities and focus our resources.

We will be introducing legislation on water so we can have enforceable standards, and we will develop regulations with our first nation partners.

In addition, the government has implemented a comprehensive monitoring system for this area of Alberta to make sure that the water quality is being appropriately sampled.

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NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Rob Anders (Calgary West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a key economic priority for our government is the Keystone XL pipeline that will create over 140,000 jobs in Canada.

However, the opposition parties seem to disagree. They do not want these jobs, or any jobs, in the oil sands.

NDP leadership candidate Brian Topp and the former environment critic have openly called for a moratorium on oil sands development.

Could the Minister of Natural Resources inform the House about the latest NDP anti-jobs plan?

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is one thing to have domestic policy disagreements. It is another to go to the United States, our largest trading partner, and advocate against Canadian exports. It is perhaps the most bizarre foreign trade mission I have ever heard of.

NDP members are apparently proud of what they should be ashamed of. They undermine what they should support. They take trips to foreign capitals when they should stay home. They are lost and unfit to govern.

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CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Sayed Sharifi is an Afghan interpreter who risked his life to help Canadian soldiers.

They have hailed Mr. Sharifi's bravery under fire and his integrity and say he is the most skilled interpreter they have ever encountered. His life is at risk after receiving death threats from the Taliban.

He is exactly the kind of person the Afghan interpreter visa was designed for. However, Mr. Sharifi's application was denied after he expressed concern with the program's inefficiency.

Will the minister do the right thing and ensure this brave servant of our troops gets the visa he so richly deserves?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government created a special program to provide opportunities to resettle in Canada for Afghan nationals who worked with our troops in Afghanistan for a period of at least one year and who are facing individualized risk to their life or safety.

There is a process in place. The process is not one where politicians arbitrarily decide who qualifies based on media reports. It is an assessment done by highly trained public servants from several departments who have, in this particular case, reviewed this application on three separate occasions and found that there are credibility problems and contradictions in this application.

He has been given the same access as everyone else who has qualified for the program, and the officials in charge have determined that he does not qualify.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, moments ago the member for Etobicoke North asked the Minister of the Environment about the inclusion of opposition members of Parliament concerned with climate change.

The accreditation process is a stroke of the pen. Where opposition members of Parliament are prepared to pay their own way, will the government commit to ensuring that opposition members of Parliament go to Durban as representatives of Canada?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague, the Minister of Natural Resources, just commented, political disagreements over the policies of our government are appropriate in this House, but I will not take a critic from an opposition party, which is opposed to every single responsible position we take with regard to climate change, greenhouse gas reduction and adaptation.

With regard to the minister who asked this question, it is under consideration.

* * *

• (1510)

[Translation]

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this point of order concerns the Hon. Prime Minister.

Points of Order

When I asked my questions, the Prime Minister tried to ridicule me by mimicking me. By trying to ridicule me, he made himself look foolish. I very respectfully ask that he apologize.

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not think that anything the member has raised poses a question of unparliamentary language. I know that there is often lots of enthusiasm in the House and he should be proud that he inspired some enthusiasm today.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I pointed out today in question period, yesterday the Minister of State for Finance falsely claimed that the Liberal Party voted against an extension of time to convert RRSPs to RRIFs during the recent recession. In fact, the Liberal Party voted for clause 15 of Bill C-10 and the bill itself in 2009. He misled the House.

In view of the fact that my friend failed to take the opportunity during question period to stand up and do the right thing and apologize for misleading the House, I want to invite my friend to do what I know he has the class to do and to do so now. Perhaps while he is up, he could tell seniors why the government is refusing to give them more time to convert their RRSPs.

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is nice to have an extension of question period.

As I said in my answer, it is hard to keep track of how much the Liberals vote against because most everything they vote against. The actual bill, they voted against.

The Speaker: It is important to remember that question period has ended and that if members have disagreements over facts or elements of motions, they should maybe take it up in the next question period.

I see the hon. member for Halifax West is rising again. I hope he has a point of order and not a continuation of the debate.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Speaker, it could become a question of privilege. In fact, this party voted for Bill C-10 in 2009. My hon. friend is misleading the House and I would invite him to withdraw his remark.

Hon. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, in fact, the hon. member is speaking about the wrong budget that it was initiated in. It was actually budget 2007 and the Liberals did vote against it in budget 2007.

Routine Proceedings

The Speaker: We have heard enough on this issue. If members want to clarify their positions on it, they can do so at other opportunities but not through points of order.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's responses to seven petitions.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Orders 104 and 114, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 10th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding the membership of committees of the House. If the House gives its consent, I intend to move concurrence in the 10th report later this day.

* * *

STATISTICS ACT

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-346, An Act to amend the Statistics Act (Chief Statistician and mandatory long-form census).

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to have the member for Burnaby—New Westminster second this very important bill.

The bill would restore the long form census and also would make sure that politics was not involved in the hiring of the chief statistician. All members would be involved in selecting the chief statistician. The bill would give direct questioning to the chief statistician himself.

What is really important to note is Canada has thrown away its long form census. That undermines many surveys that are conducted because it is used in that process. This hurts the economy and the way we actually make decisions about spending. It is my pleasure to table this bill that would fix that problem.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

* * *

• (1515)

INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-347, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (tax credit for gifts).

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce this bill.

In the last number of budgets the Conservative government has been reducing the charitable amount allowed when people make

donations to charities. This bill would reverse that trend. The bill would provide for charities to get more money back at tax time so that they would be able to provide services in the community.

It is important to note that the not-for-profit charitable sector accounts for 8% of the Canadian economy. That sector has been suffering. It has had no tax policy changes. This bill would level the playing field and provide more of an economic hit for our country than a general corporate tax cut would.

I am pleased to table the bill in an effort to help support Canadian charities and to make sure that they remain sustainable with the economy the way it is right now.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

* * *

WORKPLACE PSYCHOLOGICAL HARASSMENT PREVENTION ACT

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-348, An Act to prevent psychological harassment in the workplace and to make consequential amendments to another Act.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce this bill which deals with psychological harassment in the workplace. The bill was brought forward by a former Quebec member who is no longer in the House, but I have introduced it the last couple of times.

The bill would bring psychological harassment under the labour code. This bill would protect people who are psychologically harassed at work. There are laws similar to this in Ontario and Saskatchewan. This bill would make it more uniform and would protect workers from harassment in their workplace. We have seen the reason we need this kind of legislation in this country with the recent situation involving the RCMP.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

* * *

CANADA CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY ACT

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-349, An Act to amend the Canada Consumer Product Safety Act and the Textile Labelling Act (animal fur or skin).

He said: Mr. Speaker, it may not be common knowledge but many products on Canadian shelves actually have dog and cat fur in them. Over two million dogs and cats are slain for their fur which is imported into countries like Canada but consumers are not aware of that.

The bill would require that if dog or cat fur was used in a product, the product would have to have a label to that effect so consumers would know. This is important because of the inhumane nature involved in the slaying of dogs and cats, animals that we have as pets in Canada. If Canadians knew that their child's toy or a scarf or coat contained dog or cat fur, I am sure most Canadians would not choose those products.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

FEDERAL LAW—CIVIL LAW HARMONIZATION ACT NO. 3

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC) moved that Bill S-3, A third Act to harmonize federal law with the civil law of Quebec and to amend certain Acts in order to ensure that each language version takes into account the common law and the civil law be read a first time.

(Motion deemed adopted and bill read the first time)

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the House gives its consent, I move that the 10th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs presented to the House earlier this day be concurred in.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

• (1520)

[Translation]

PETITIONS

MINING

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present a petition signed by more than 540 residents in my riding who oppose the opening of the Elmtree mine. This mine will operate for a very short 18 months, but it will cause significant damage to the residents and the environment in the Chaleur region. This mining operation will lower property values and diminish the quality of life of the local people. The Nigadoo River basin and Chaleur Bay will be polluted, which will threaten the drinking water of a number of residents in my riding.

They are calling on Parliament and the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency to refuse to give the Castle Resources mining company a mining permit.

[English]

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Mr. Peter Braid (Kitchener—Waterloo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition certified by the clerk of petitions. The petition is from constituents in my riding and is regarding the CCSVI treatment for multiple sclerosis.

Routine Proceedings

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have another petition to present from a number of people in western Canada, particularly in and around Saskatoon. They are concerned about Canadians who are suffering from both chronic cerebrospinal venous insufficiency and multiple sclerosis, and the fact that many of those Canadians are denied testing or treatment for CCSVI in Canada.

The petitioners are calling upon the Minister of Health to consult broadly with experts who have practical experience in treating CCSVI. They call upon the Minister of Health to proceed urgently with phase III clinical trials. They ask the Minister of Health to develop a follow-up scheme so that the case history of these patients can be properly tracked.

I am pleased to present that petition today.

HEALTH OF ANIMALS ACT

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have three petitions. The first is in support of my Bill C-322.

The petitioners state that horses are ordinarily kept and treated as sporting and companion animals. They are not raised as food-producing animals. They are commonly administered drugs which are prohibited for use in the food chain. The petitioners ask the House of Commons to adopt into legislation an act to amend the Health of Animals Act and the Meat Inspection Act, thus prohibiting the importation or exportation of horses for slaughter for human consumption as well as horsemeat products for human consumption.

The petitioners are from New Brunswick.

CANADA POST

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have never had a petition as big as this one. There are over 2,000 names, of which 1,000 come from Quesnel, British Columbia, over 300 from Nelson in the West Kootenay region, and the rest from other parts of British Columbia.

These citizens are concerned that Canada Post announced it will be removing mail processing from local cities, towns and communities in British Columbia and sending it to Vancouver, which it is already doing. This has resulted in the reduction of services and loss of good-paying jobs, which has negatively affected our communities.

The petitioners are calling upon the Government of Canada to support local economies by preserving local jobs and maintaining mail processing at post offices in local cities, towns and communities throughout British Columbia.

The other petition deals with the same subject in regard to the post office.

The petitioners are asking that prior to making any changes to their mail processing and transportation network, Canada Post conduct a thorough and in-depth study into the service and economic impact on local communities and use those results to hold full, open and transparent consultations with local communities that will be impacted by the changes.

Privilege

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition regarding chronic cerebrospinal venous insufficiency, CCSVI.

While the government has announced clinical trials for CCSVI, all there is right now are announcements. What is needed is action.

Canadians with MS cannot afford to wait as any delay possibly means more damage.

Some 30% to 50% of MS patients who are untreated worsen by one EDSS score in one year and 50% with relapsing remitting MS later develop a progressive form of the disease for which there are no drugs.

Therefore, the petitioners call on the Minister of Health to consult experts actively engaged in the diagnosis and treatment of CCSVI to undertake phase III clinical trials on an urgent basis with a large patient participation in multiple centres across Canada and to require follow-up care.

• (1525)

CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon (Mississauga East—Cooksville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition to the House on behalf of concerned Canadians regarding the public funding of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

The petitioners are asking the government and the House to end the public funding of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. The corporation receives about \$1.1 billion per annum. That gives it an unfair advantage over its private sector competitors.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am presenting a petition on behalf of petitioners in my riding.

The petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to support my Bill C-305 and to enact a Canadian public transit strategy. They desire a fast, reliable, accessible and affordable public transit system across Canada. They want the federal government to provide a permanent investment plan to support public transit, establish a federal funding mechanism for public transit, and work together with all levels of government to provide sustainable, predictable, long-term and adequate funding for public transit.

SERVICE CANADA

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition brought to me by the residents of Bonavista North in my riding.

The petitioners would like to call to the attention of the House the community partnership office with Service Canada. The agreement in place is to help out smaller rural areas with Service Canada, but the partnership offices will no longer exist after the end of March 2012.

This is a vital service, especially for seniors and those most vulnerable, but now it will be an outreach program with Service Canada in Gander, which is several hours away. The problem is that

the government will be closing the processing centres as well for Service Canada and services will be diminished in these areas.

The community partnership that the petitioners speak of is a vital service and becoming increasingly vital now that these cuts and measures are about to come.

I thank the constituents in Bonavista North in the areas of New-Wes-Valley, Deadman's Bay, Badger's Quay and other areas of the riding of Bonavista North. I hope the House will find this in good position.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: The Chair has notice of a question of privilege from the hon. member Mount Royal.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

TELEPHONE CALLS TO MOUNT ROYAL CONSTITUENTS

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am rising on a question of privilege raised by some very troubling circumstances. My riding office is receiving numerous calls in this matter and thus I am raising it now, as per the requirement that questions of privilege be raised at the first available opportunity.

It seems that constituents in my riding of Mount Royal have been receiving calls from a telephone number identified as "campaign research", asking my constituents if they intend to support the Conservative Party in the impending, if not imminent, byelection.

The very fact that I am standing here in this place and otherwise discharging my responsibilities clearly illustrates that there is no vacancy in the electoral district of Mount Royal and thus no pending byelection. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, it is you who informs the House of such vacancies.

However, as personally disconcerting as this matter is, it has, more important, serious consequences for the work of a member of Parliament and indeed should be a matter of concern for all members of the House.

Accordingly I raise this question of privilege as I believe this matter constitutes a prima facie breach of my parliamentary privilege and prejudices the work of the House and this institution. If the Speaker so agrees, I would move the appropriate motion at the appropriate time.

It is long established, and O'Brien and Bosc so notes it on page 113. I am quoting from a ruling by Speaker Bosley, although it is sometimes mis-attributed to Speaker Fraser. The ruling is as follows:

It should go without saying that a Member of Parliament needs to perform his functions effectively and that anything tending to cause confusion as to a Member's identity creates the possibility of an impediment to the fulfilment of that Member's functions.

Here is the key point, Mr. Speaker. I continue:

Any action which impedes or tends to impede a Member in the discharge of his duties is a breach of privilege.

Further, as per speaker's ruling of May 3, 2006, and found in *Hansard Debates*, and reiterating a line of similar Speakers' rulings, Speakers have consistently upheld the right of the House to the services of its members free from "intimidation, obstruction and interference". That is why I say this is a matter of concern not only to myself and my constituents but to the House as a whole.

While there may be additional issues of misusing an electoral list and other conduct beyond the purview of the Speaker and the parliamentary process, this practice inhibits and impedes the exercise of my parliamentary functions or, indeed, of any member of Parliament so targeted.

For example, beyond the phone calls, emails and requests for meetings as a result of these calls, which themselves are an encumbrance, it causes confusion among the electorate. It impedes me in the discharge of my functions, which as O'Brien and Bosc quoted earlier states, constitutes a breach of privilege.

Constituents are asking my office and myself when will this imminent, but as I said, non-existent byelection, in fact be occurring? Calls have come in asking, and constituents are surprised, if not shocked, by this, whether I am still serving. Such questions cause damage to my reputation and credibility and would do so to any member of the House.

Just 10 or so days ago in a householder circulated to my constituents, I outlined, as members of the House do when sending these householders, various initiatives in Parliament. I made reference to items I hoped to see adopted in the House. Accordingly how are my constituents supposed to reconcile my reference to things I am fighting for in Parliament with what they hear "The member is, or has, stepped down?"

The insinuation therefore that I am abandoning my MP role here is at variance with the truth. I am saying this at the risk of sounding self-serving just to put the facts on the record, but I may have more motions on the order paper than any other member of this place. I seek to take my responsibilities as a parliamentarian very seriously, be it in committee, where now before the justice and legal affairs committee I have some 50 amendments with respect to the proposed omnibus crime bill, or in parliamentary debate, where like many other members in the House I remain an active member in take note debates, or just to use today as a case study, like other members in the House, I posed a question in question period and earlier made a statement.

• (1530)

However, the key point is that work, as it would be with regard to the work of any member in the House, gets overshadowed and overtaken if my constituents are made to think that I am not even here or am about to leave.

Mr. Speaker, I refer your attention to page 112 of O'Brien and Bosc on this matter. In the past, Speakers have found *prima facie* breaches of privilege related to the damaging of a member's reputation. Therein are references to two Speaker's rulings, one of April 2005, in relation to a matter raised by the then-member for

Privilege

Windsor West, and one in October 2005 on a question from the then member for Bourassa.

These rulings dealt with mailings that contained false and misleading information to constituents or that misrepresented their source. While, and I understand well, the Speaker cannot intervene on matters of debate and on disputes as to facts, these rulings demonstrate that *prima facie* breaches occur, and this is the important point, as you know only too well, Mr. Speaker, when the cumulative effect of such misrepresentation of facts either causes confusion as to the identity of the member or attacks one's reputation such as to damage his or her credibility in a serious way in the minds of the electorate.

Simply put, I have made no announcement about stepping down as the member of Parliament for Mount Royal. While others might, and I would hate to cast aspersions on my ageism, think that I am stepping down, there is in fact no byelection planned or pending. Any suggestion otherwise falsely offers a critique that I am not present here in Ottawa and working for my constituents in an ongoing way on matters of concern to them and on matters of concern to the House.

Indeed, misinforming my constituents can create difficulties for any MP. I draw to the attention of the House comments of the Speaker on December 1, 2009, regarding a privilege matter I then raised and which the Speaker agreed in the sense of finding a *prima facie* breach of my privileges in the matter of false and misleading mailings then sent to my riding. In his comments the Speaker, Mr. Milliken, said:

The privilege here was that a member's ability to do his or her job was interfered with by sending this material into his or her constituency. In this case, it was the member for Mount Royal's constituency.

The material was not accurate and caused problems for the member in doing his job as a member of Parliament....Hon. members know that members raising questions of privilege are not normally trying to settle whether a statement is true or not. It is a matter of whether their privileges as members have been breached.

Indeed, even if one views the question of whether there is a pending byelection as a dispute over facts, though clearly there is no dispute over facts as there is no pending byelection, the spreading of such false information, and this is the important point, is a breach of my privileges and interferes with the discharge of my function, as it would be a prejudice to any of the members of the House involved in such conduct and, indeed, may prejudice the institution of Parliament itself.

Simply put, how am I, or any member, to effectively represent a constituency if the constituents are led to believe that the member is no longer their elected representative? How can one correct the confusion and prejudicial damage that has been done in the minds of those who may think I am no longer their representative in Parliament or no longer discharging my duties?

Government Orders

In short, telling my constituents that I am resigning and that there is a byelection imminently occurring is not only patently false, but the clear and important point here is that it violates my privileges as a member and should be regarded by all members in the House as an unacceptable practice for this institution and its members. The particularly relevant part is that while this occurred in my riding of Mount Royal, nothing is to stop this from occurring in another riding and this practice ends up being an affront to all who serve in this place.

If you require more information on this matter prior to ruling, Mr. Speaker, I would be pleased to table appropriate documentation before the House. As I noted before, if you agree that this is a *prima facie* breach of privilege, I would be prepared to move the appropriate motion to refer this matter to committee which, with its investigative powers, could get to the bottom of this and recommend appropriate sanctions in the circumstances where appropriate.

• (1535)

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to support the member's motion for your determination that this is a clear *prima facie* breach of his privileges as a member of this House. It is the same type of abuse that any one of us could be exposed to.

One point I want to make is that at some point down the road, once it goes to committee, the committee will use its investigative powers, and we are potentially not able ultimately to determine the source or sources of this conduct. That is not an issue that should be of concern for your ruling. Your ruling is simply on whether, on the face of it, it is clearly a breach of his privilege.

It is a breach to any one of us if that type of conduct is allowed to stand. It is important for his constituency to be advised that this House, through you, Mr. Speaker, has made a determination that it is a breach of his privilege. That finding and ruling on your behalf is quite crucial to redress some of the loss and abuse that he has suffered in his relationship with his constituents, so it is quite important that the ruling be made.

I would suggest it is also important that the ruling be made fairly rapidly.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know nothing of the activities that the hon. member has complained of, though it is quite evident and the government is certainly willing to admit that he is in fact here today in Parliament. That, I think, is evident to everybody.

However, it does bring to mind a dilemma that was faced by Sir John A. Macdonald over several decades, when George Brown, holding the editorial pen of *The Globe*, repeatedly wrote that he was about to resign. Though that did go on for several decades, I do not ever recall a point of order being made or a point of privilege being made at that time.

However, if we do see fit to make further submissions, we will advise you.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. members for their interventions. The Chair will take this under advisement.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1540)

[Translation]

THE NATIONAL DEFENCE ACT

(Bill C-16. On the Order: Government Orders:)

November 15, 2011 — Consideration at report stage of Bill C-16, An Act to amend the National Defence Act (military judges) — The Minister of National Defence.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties and I would ask for unanimous consent for the following motion:

That, notwithstanding any standing order or usual practices of this House, Bill C-16, An Act to amend the National Defence Act (military judges), be deemed concurred in at report stage and deemed read a third time and passed.

[English]

The Speaker: Does the hon. government House leader have the unanimous consent of the House to move this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to, bill concurred in at report stage, read the third time and passed)

* * *

KEEPING CANADA'S ECONOMY AND JOBS GROWING ACT

BILL C-13—TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC) moved:

That in relation to Bill C-13, An Act to implement certain provisions of the 2011 budget as updated on June 6, 2011 and other measures, not more than one further sitting day shall be allotted to the consideration of the report stage and one sitting day shall be allotted to the third reading stage of the said bill and, fifteen minutes before the expiry of the time provided for government business on the day allotted to the consideration of the report stage and on the day allotted to the third reading stage of the bill, any proceedings before the House shall be interrupted, if required for the purpose of the order, and in turn every question necessary for the disposal of the stage of the bill then under consideration shall be put forthwith and successively without further debate or amendment.

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 67.1, there will now be a 30-minute question period.

I invite all hon. members who wish to ask questions to rise in their places so the Chair has some idea of the number of members who wish to participate.

If we keep our questions and answers to about a minute each, we should be able to accommodate many members. As has been our accustomed practice, preference will be given to opposition MPs. Although government members will have the opportunity to ask questions, the Chair will recognize more opposition MPs to allow them a chance to question the government.

Government Orders

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, here we go again. It is the sixth time in 33 days since we came back in September that the government has moved for time allocation. It is the second time the government has done it on this bill, a bill that is 644 pages long. We have had an absolute minimum number of hours for debate here at second reading, in committee and then back here in the House for report stage and third reading.

It is particularly offensive when we see what has just happened. A few minutes ago the government House leader had all parties' support to run a bill through this House on consent. It was a straightforward bill, deserving of support from all sides. It had support from all sides. That is the third time that has happened in this session of Parliament.

There is no pattern at all in this Parliament of opposition parties acting in an obstructive way. What we are simply asking for, and what we are entitled to, is a reasonable amount of time to debate bills. Again, it is 644 pages and it is a budget bill.

I think it is important that I make the point that follows. I am going to quote from O'Brien and Bosc, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*. It states:

The cardinal principle governing Parliament's treatment of financial measures...

I will divert from the quote. There are 644 pages of financial measures in this text.

...was that they be given the fullest possible consideration in committee and in the House.

I am going to quote again, from Bourinot's *Parliamentary Procedure and Practice in the Dominion of Canada*. It tells us that:

...no member may be forced to come to a hasty decision, but that every one may have abundant opportunities afforded him of stating his reasons for supporting or opposing the proposed grant.

Again, that is the financial one.

In this light, how can the government House leader possibly justify closing off debate in this way on a budget bill?

● (1545)

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, this is perhaps the most debated budget bill in my lifetime, or certainly in my memory.

The budget was introduced in March. The first efforts by the opposition to obstruct the bill were actually to bring down this Parliament and to have an election called. In that election, the essence of our platform and the main subject of debate among the voters was in fact this budget.

It was debated by all Canadians for an entire election. What did Canadians say at the end of that election? They liked that budget so much and wanted the government to do it so much that they gave the government a majority, the first majority government in Canada in four Parliaments.

As a result of that mandate, that request from Canadians that we implement the budget that they debated in that election, we have moved forward with it.

This is the 2011 budget we are talking about. It was introduced in March. If the hon. members opposite have their way, it would not even be passed into law in 2011. We would be having it in 2012. In

fact, we might have the 2012 budget before we have the 2011 budget implemented. That is the way the opposition would do it.

This is at a time when we have, on the global stage, economic challenges unprecedented in my lifetime. We have very significant global challenges that need a response and that need the low-tax plan for jobs and growth that we are implementing through this budget implementation bill. That is why we have to do it. We have to deliver on the commitments we made to Canadians to get Canada's economy moving.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government House leader's arguments are absolutely, totally bogus.

There is no justification whatsoever for a majority government to use its majority to try to limit the ability of the opposition to hold the government accountable. An election cannot be used as a card to give the government full rights to bring in time allocation any time it wants. That is just not right.

I believe that Canadians as a whole would not support this new majority government's attitude of arrogance and its feeling that it has the right to prevent the exchange of accountability inside the House of Commons today.

We have this motion today because the government, and in particular the government House leader, have failed to negotiate in good faith to expedite the passage of bills.

The opposition has shown good will. Bills have passed. As just mentioned, a bill passed just prior to this motion. We have shown how quickly we can do things.

My question to the government House leader is this: does he not see the value of having good, solid negotiations with opposition House leaders and opposition members so that we can facilitate good, healthy, accountable debate inside the chamber before continually bringing in time allocation motion after time allocation motion? Does he not see the merit in negotiation?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, what this government values and what Canadians valued in the last election was a government that is prepared to take action to help the Canadian economy. That is what we are doing with this bill: taking action that is required at this challenging time in the global economy.

Government Orders

Let us consider some of the actions that my friends opposite have voted against and now wish to delay with further debate: a hiring credit for small business to ensure and support hiring and the creation of new jobs; tax support for clean energy generation; a tax credit for volunteer firefighters; a new family caregiver tax credit; enhancing the Wage Earner Protection Program Act; a tax credit for children's involvement in music and dance lessons to help local economies; the extension for a further two years of the accelerated capital cost allowance to allow manufacturers and businesses to invest in new equipment to make them more competitive, so that they can compete and create jobs against the rest of the world at a time when we really need to do that.

These are the measures that the other parties are saying should not be allowed to pass. These are the measures that they wish to delay and obstruct further. It was not good enough that they forced an election and tried to prevent these measures from being put in place; now they want to prevent them from being put in place at all this year, when we need them in place before the next taxation year and budget year take effect.

• (1550)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what the House leader just said is absolute rubbish. We have never seen a government that has been this arrogant in using the sledgehammer of closure repeatedly over 33 days. It has now used it six times over 33 days. Even the Brian Mulroney government was not that arrogant. Even the Liberals at their worst did not invoke closure all the time.

Mr. Speaker, as you well know, the Conservatives promised during the election campaign to be moderate. There is one other thing they promised with this new bill that we have only been debating for a few hours at report stage: they promised that they would not include the Canadian Securities Regulation Regime Transition Office and would wait for the Supreme Court judgment. Over the last few hours, we have been exposing the lie. They went to the public promising something that they have not delivered, and that is the real reason for this closure. They are closing down now, for the sixth time in 33 days, a whole variety of legislation. They simply do not respect the parliamentary democracy that we live under.

I was attending Remembrance Day ceremonies, like so many other New Democrats. We are proud of the veterans who fought. Many of them died; many of them gave their lives, limbs and mental health, often to preserve parliamentary democracy, and now we are seeing the government rip it up. The government is showing no respect for Parliament, no respect for the chance to debate and no respect for the opposition's ability to bring forward the fact that it has broken its election commitments and promises.

Is that not the real reason the government is invoking closure yet again in this Parliament?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member had any respect for Parliament, he would understand that we have not once moved closure. We are talking about time allocation, whereby we allocate a certain amount of time for the debate of bills.

An hon. member: It's a form of closure.

Mr. Peter Julian: It's closure.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I invite my friend to read the Standing Orders and acquaint himself with the rules of Parliament.

What I can tell you is that it cannot be delayed further. Something that Canadians need at this important time is action on the economy, action to create jobs and economic growth.

I will take one element as an example, the accelerated capital cost allowance, the piece that allows businesses to write off their investments in new equipment and machinery on a quick two-year basis. Jayson Myers from the Canadian manufacturers' association said, "This is something that is very important. Manufacturers, and many businesses generally, and the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters strongly support and congratulate the government for extending it in the budget."

That is why Soprema in British Columbia made a multi-million dollar expansion. That is what has helped Celestica move into solar panel manufacturing. It has helped Prévost bus lines in Quebec develop a new robotic system and it has helped Aberfoyle Metal Treators get a new contract with Boeing to do heat treating. I could go on and on.

We are moving forward with measures to create jobs; they want to stop those measures to create jobs. They tried to do it by forcing an election on this issue and they lost the election on this issue. Canadians asked us to move forward, and that is what we are doing right now: delivering on our low-tax plan for jobs and growth.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, throughout the world and right here in Canada and Quebec, many people are protesting. I think we will have to pitch our tents inside Parliament to make this government understand that, although it may have a majority, it does not have a dictatorial mandate to do whatever it wants, whenever it wants and whenever it sees fit, and to invoke closure with every bill.

We are now rising almost every week in this House to speak out against this government's way of doing things, which does not allow for debate. Debate is democracy. I do not understand why this government, knowing that it has a majority and will win every vote, is incapable of listening to the people. We, the opposition parties, speak on their behalf, as does the government. All of us represent the people, not just those on one side of the House.

We would have liked to talk about the Canada-wide securities commission, which is not at all acceptable to Quebec. This is a bone of contention between the federal government and Quebec, as well as other provinces. The government refuses to discuss it. There is also no unanimity with respect to funding for political parties.

Government Orders

Can the minister tell me why the government refuses to allow debate and why it is constantly shutting down debate? The Conservatives are not acting like a democratic government.

• (1555)

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I think that the people of Quebec and Canada consider the economy, economic growth and job creation to be serious priorities. These are our government's priorities—its top priorities even.

For example, in this budget, we have measures to remove the limit on eligible expenses caregivers can claim for their financially dependent relatives under the medical expense tax credit. To help job creation, we propose helping apprentices in the skilled trades, as well as workers in regulated professions, by making occupational, trade and professional examination fees eligible for the tuition tax credit.

We have many measures related to training and job creation. Our priority is our plan for job creation and economic growth.

[English]

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, every one of us in this room was elected to represent our constituents, and we were elected to be members of Parliament in a parliamentary democracy. A parliamentary democracy does not shut down debate so other points of view are not heard.

I heard from my colleague earlier that this budget was debated last March. Many of us were not in the House last March.

The budget is actually bigger than many telephone books in many of our small towns around the country, and yet the debate is being limited so that we cannot shine light on what is in the budget.

If the debate were allowed to proceed, the government would get to paint a glorious picture of what it thinks it is doing, and we, as the opposition, would get to comment on what is good and what is lacking in that budget.

Surely, parliamentary democracy requires time for parliamentarians to debate. The government cannot start behaving as if we were living in an autocracy.

My question is, will the government allow the opposition to debate this without time constraints?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, this budget has been debated more than any other budget I can imagine in my lifetime.

It was the subject of an election campaign. If my colleague from Newton—North Delta did not have an opportunity to review that big document, the budget, in March, and she did not have a chance to shine light on it during that period of time when all Canadians were making their choices on how they wanted to vote and who they wanted as their government, then I do not believe another day of debate would help her.

Canadians had a chance to make a choice on this budget. They debated this budget, not just parliamentarians, but all Canadians. Those Canadians voted and gave a strong mandate to our government to deliver on our low tax plan for jobs and growth. They gave us a mandate to do it months ago. The budget was introduced in March, and my colleagues opposite are saying they have not had time to study it yet.

Where were they during the election? Where have they been for the past six months? It has been there in black and white. It is time to get on. Let us deliver results for the economy and let us deliver those results now.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonaville—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, earlier it was said that it is not closure the hon. member is talking about here, but time allocation.

Certainly, the way it is playing out right now is an affront to anybody who is elected, no matter where they sit in the House.

There are so many new members in the House from both sides. I have heard many Conservative members speak eloquently about this particular budget; they made their views known.

Yet there are many other brand new MPs who would also like to speak on this budget and this measure. Why does the hon. member not provide this opportunity for his new members to continue the debate and allow them to have their say, based on the fact that their constituents voted for them to do so?

• (1600)

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, the members of this House, through the course of an election campaign and the months that followed since the adoption and debate on the budget itself and now on the budget implementation act, have had ample opportunity to pass the bill.

I am concerned about the Canadians with families who are looking for the major earner to find a job. They are looking for that job to be created. The people who are waiting for us to pass our small business job creation tax credit need to see that stimulus in the economy. Businesses are waiting for the assurance to make investments that can be written off on an accelerated basis so that they can create jobs and help local economies compete.

I think that six months is plenty of time for the opposition to have debated this issue. Now we need to deliver real action for Canadians. That is what Canadians are really concerned about. When are they going to see these measures put into law so they can enjoy the benefits of economic growth and jobs?

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, only a few moments ago the New Democrats were introducing a bill about labelling products that use cat fur. The government right now is talking about moving forward a low tax plan for jobs and growth.

Can the House leader comment on the priority of ensuring that we get this through: a budget for 2011 in 2011 and not next year or some other time?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I do agree that there seems to be a difference in priorities.

Government Orders

The priority of the opposition is to have more opportunity to hear itself talk, to debate, but not to take action. However, the priority of the government is to deliver on the tax credit for job creation; benefits so that businesses can create jobs, invest and become more competitive; tax credits to further support clean energy generation; tax credits for mining exploration; and tax credits for families so that their children can continue to participate, even in challenging times, in activities like music and dance lessons to enhance their quality of life and create jobs in local communities.

Those are our priorities. It is not a priority to have another month of debate after we have already had six months and an entire election to talk about it.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the statement made about the tax measures in Bill C-13, the Conservatives clearly seem to forget that their behaviour was underhanded. They deliberately transformed a budget bill into an omnibus bill containing items that must be discussed in a democracy.

They decided to make constitutional amendments by creating a Canadian securities commission when they do not have the right to do so under the Constitution. They also decided to include a major amendment to the legislation on political party financing in this bill. These are things that could have been the subject of much debate, but the government knowingly and deliberately made the decision to include these non-budget, non-monetary items in this bill. These two items do not pertain to any financial legislation and do not create any jobs. However, the Conservatives decided to disrupt everything, to include everything and to shut us up as quickly as possible. That is what they did. That is why there should be significant and structured discussion on these items.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I am a bit surprised to hear the member say that a measure such as political party subsidies is not a spending question. Subsidies cost millions of dollars each year. I understand that the NDP wants to receive money from taxpayers for their political activities every year, but we feel that this is an unnecessary expenditure. It is now up to parties to raise their own money. That is our government's opinion.

• (1605)

[English]

We debated these issues in the election and they are important spending questions. However, right now we are really focused on jobs, economic growth and creating the right environment for Canada's economy to continue its performance, which is better than that of all the other major western countries, but it needs to keep on track.

What we see today is an example of opposition parties that simply do not understand the fundamental economic priorities of Canadians today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): There are still several members who wish to ask questions and there are seven minutes remaining. I ask that members keep their questions and responses to less than a minute.

The hon. member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I find it very offensive that for the sixth time in 33 days the government has put time allocation on debate. This is a debate on a 644-page document that is not the same document as that presented before the election. There are similarities, but they are not the same.

The same thing is happening in committee. The government wants to close down debate and is not allowing motions to go through.

Is the government planning to prorogue? Is that why it is rushing everything through? Is that why it is trying to run this as a dictatorship? Let us not forget that the Conservatives only received 39% of the vote.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I do not know what to do with those questions from a party that received less than 30% of the vote.

We have had a phenomenal amount of debate on this budget. At a time when we see economic meltdown in Europe, challenges in the global economy, the Americans wrestling with debts and deficits far in excess of ours, the real question we have to ask ourselves is: how do we make sure that we are delivering on the economic priorities of Canadians?

Our government is focused on the economic priorities of Canadians: job creation, a tax credit for the creation of jobs through small businesses, economic growth by allowing businesses to invest and create jobs to become more competitive and allowing mining exploration to proceed—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. Questions and comments. The hon. member for Elgin—Middlesex—London.

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a small businessman and a politician I went through an election on this budget. Much discussion took place about the benefits in this budget for business, job creation and families.

I go home each weekend and am asked if we have done that yet. My constituents ask me when they will be able to take advantage of the job creation credits or the art tax credit. They wonder why it takes so long. I will let the minister answer.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, the experience of the member for Elgin—Middlesex—London corresponds exactly with my experience. I thought it corresponded with what the opposition wanted because those members used to ask about a jobs plan. They wanted to see some action on jobs. We are delivering action on jobs.

While we are doing that, not only does the NDP have its folks down in the United States trying to kill Canadian job creation, but it is right here with another group in the House trying to keep job creation plans from going forward, trying to block a tax credit for job creation, trying to block benefits to allow businesses to invest and become competitive.

Government Orders

Whether we are talking about industries like sealing, asbestos and oil, opportunities to export, or job creation tax credits, the opposition parties have a clear track record: they are fighting against the creation of jobs for Canadians. We are working to create jobs for Canadians.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government House leader made reference to jobs. From day one, the Liberal Party of Canada has been talking about the importance of jobs.

One of our fundamentals is that proper debate should take place. When we debate a bill it is always nice to have the minister who is responsible for it listen to what is being said, and even possibly answer some questions.

Does the government House leader not believe that there is an obligation on the minister who is sponsoring a bill to listen to what is being said on the bill and possibly even answer a question? Better yet, I would like to see the Minister of Finance stand up and answer this question, but I suspect he will not.

• (1610)

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my hon. friend opposite. He is interested in talking about jobs. Apparently, he is more interested in talking about jobs than allowing us to get on with creating those jobs. Will he come around and agree that we should be creating jobs?

Why do the opposition parties want to delay, for example, enhancements to the wage earner protection program? While people around the world are losing their jobs, we want to protect the wages of Canadians whose businesses face challenges or who might lose their jobs. Why does the member want to delay that protection further? Is it for the satisfaction of talking a few more times on the bill that he has already talked on dozens of times? Why is that his priority?

Our priority has to be hard-working Canadians. We have to get on their side and deliver for them. That is what this government is doing.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst has the floor for a final question.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is surprising to listen to the government. We know that it goes to the trouble of sending our troops overseas to fight for democracy. Yet here in Canada, it sounds as though the Conservative government, which was elected on May 2, believes that Parliament should be shut down for the next four years.

There is no need for debate because Canadians told the Conservatives what they need and that they agree with the government. That is completely undemocratic. And this is not just about Bill C-13 and the budget; this is about all of the bills. The government does not want to listen to the opposition or to Canadians. What this government is doing is undemocratic. It had better think twice; otherwise, it does not believe in democracy or in the institution of Parliament.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, the government tabled a budget in March 2011. Today is November 16, 2011, a number of

months later, a number of months after the election and after numerous debates on the budget. Now we are debating whether it is possible to hold a vote on that budget and give the other place, the Senate, the opportunity to review the matter. The same process needs to be followed there in order to see this through.

I have a simple question for the hon. member. Why does he not want to see an immediate improvement in the wage earner protection program and have it apply to more workers affected by an employer bankruptcy or receivership? Why does he want to block this very important measure for workers in New Brunswick and across Canada?

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Saint-Jean, Gasoline Prices; the hon. member for Ottawa—Vanier, Official Languages; the hon. member for Terrebonne—Blainville, Poverty.

[*Translation*]

It is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith the question necessary to dispose of the motion now before the House.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those in favour of the motion will please say *yea*.

Some hon. members: *Yea*.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those opposed will please say *nay*.

Some hon. members: *Nay*.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Call in the members.

• (1655)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(*Division No. 56*)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy
Adler
Albas
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Ambler
Anders
Armstrong
Aspin
Benoit
Bezan

Adams
Aglukkaq
Albrecht
Allison
Ambrose
Anderson
Ashfield
Bateman
Bernier
Blaney

Points of Order

Bloch	Bougen	Byrne	Caron
Braid	Breitkreuz	Casey	Cash
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Charlton	Chicoine
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooogee	Chow	Christopherson
Butt	Calandra	Cleary	Coderre
Calkins	Cannan	Comartin	Côté
Carmichael	Carrie	Cotler	Crowder
Chisu	Chong	Cuzner	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Clarke	Clement	Day	Dion
Daniel	Davidson	Dionne Labelle	Donnelly
Dechert	Del Mastro	Doré Lefebvre	Dubé
Devolin	Dreesen	Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Dykstra	Dussault	Easter
Fantino	Fast	Eyking	Fortin
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)	Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Freeman	Gaumeau
Fletcher	Galipeau	Garrison	Genest-Jourdain
Gallant	Gill	Giguère	Godin
Glover	Goguen	Goodale	Grogg
Goldring	Goodyear	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)	Harris (St. John's East)
Gosal	Gourde	Hughes	Hyer
Grewal	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Jacob	Julian
Hayes	Hiebert	Kellway	Lamoureux
Hilmyer	Hoback	Lapointe	Larose
Hoeppner	Holder	Laverdière	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
James	Jean	Mai	Marston
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Martin	Masse
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent	Mathyssen	May
Kerr	Komarnicki	McCallum	McGuinity
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	Michaud
Lauson	Lebel	Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Leaf	Lemieux	Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Leung	Lizon	Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	Mourani
Lobb	Lukiwski	Murray	Nantel
Lunney	MacKay (Central Nova)	Nash	Nicholls
MacKenzie	Mayes	Nunez-Melo	Pacetti
McColeman	McLeod	Papillon	Patry
Menegakis	Menzies	Pécelet	Perreault
Merrifield	Miller	Pilon	Plamondon
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)		Quach	Rac
Moore (Fundy Royal)		Rafferty	Ravignat
Norlock	O'Connor	Raynault	Regan
O'Neill Gordon	Oda	Roussau	Sandhu
Oliver	Opitz	Savoie	Scarpaleggia
Paradis	Payne	Sclah	Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
Penashue	Pollivier	sort)	
Preston	Raitt	Sims (Newton—North Delta)	St-Denis
Rajotte	Rathgeber	Stewart	Stoffer
Reid	Rempel	Sullivan	Thibeault
Richards	Richardson	Toone	Tremblay
Rickford	Ritz	Trudeau	Turnell
Schellenberger	Seebach	Valériote— 117	
Shea	Shipley		
Shory	Smith		
Sopuck	Sorenson		
Stanton	Storseth		
Strahl	Sweet		
Tilson	Toet		
Toews	Trost		
Trottier	Truppe		
Twedd	Uppal		
Valcourt	Van Kesteren		
Van Loan	Vellacott		
Wallace	Warawa		
Warkentin	Watson		
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)			
Weston (Saint John)			
Wilks	Williamson		
Wong	Woodworth		
Young (Oakville)	Young (Vancouver South)		
Zimmer — 155			

NAYS*Members*

Allen (Welland)
Atamanenko
Bélanger
Bennett
Bevington
Blanchette-Lamothe
Borg
Boutin-Sweet
Brisson

Angus
Aubin
Bellavance
Benskin
Blanchette
Boivin
Boulrice
Brahmi
Brossau

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

I wish to inform the House that because of the debate on the time allocation motion, Government Orders will be extended by 30 minutes.

* * *

*[English]***POINTS OF ORDER****COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order to continue the argument we have had over the motion I brought on Monday with regard to the proceedings that have been going on in the ethics committee, if I could complete that in response to the government House leader's argument of yesterday.

I really do not expect the whole House to stay, if people want to go. As witty, eloquent and brilliant as my argument will be, I think a number of members may want to leave at this point.

Points of Order

The Speaker: Order, please. Perhaps I will give the House a few moments to leave if members wish, although I am sure they will miss the hon. member's intervention, so the member for Windsor—Tecumseh can be heard when he does add to his remarks from Monday.

I will ask all hon. colleagues, if they do need to carry on conversations, to do so outside the chamber so the Chair can listen to the member for Windsor—Tecumseh.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to have you hear this response to the arguments we had from the House leader yesterday.

At the outset, I read through his arguments in the blues because I was not in the House when he made them. I believe he has made a number of errors in his argument and I want to address those. Also, there were a number that were just irrelevant, but I will touch on those as I go through.

Let me start with the comments where he seemed to have focused on the fact that committees were their own masters. I clearly acknowledged that in my remarks when I made my argument on Monday. However, I want to emphasize, as I said at that time, committee members, chair and committee as a whole are regularly responsible for our own conduct, but it is not an absolute authority on our part. There are times, Mr. Speaker, and this is one of them I would argue, when you should intervene. It is not an absolute right for committees to be in charge of their own responsibilities.

The House leader acknowledged that in his talk to the House when he said, "I would agree that in certain situations the Speaker ought to intervene". He admitted again that he was wrong when he said that because he blew his argument when he was supporting mine.

Mr. Speaker, let me go to the times when it is appropriate for you to intervene, using again the House leader's quote from Mr. Speaker Parent when he said the Speaker had the right to intervene because "The Chair found there was an evident breach of the Standing Orders".

The litmus test, as set by the Government House Leader, seems clear in this regard, that if the committee chair or the committee itself is in breach of the Standing Orders, the Speaker should intervene, which is what I am asking you to do, Mr. Speaker.

You will recall in my initial remarks, Mr. Speaker, when I quoted the *House of Commons Procedures and Practice*, second edition, by O'Brien and Bosc, on page 1048:

At all times, directives from procedural sources higher than parliamentary committees (Constitution; statutes; orders of reference, instructions and Standing Orders of the House; and rulings by the Speaker) take precedence over any rules a committee may adopt.

Therefore, using the government House leader's litmus test that the Speaker should intervene when committees break Standing Orders in conjunction with the superiority of rules like the *sub judice* convention and the division of powers set out in the Constitution, it seems that he and I can agree that when the Constitution and conventions are contravened by the committee, that the Speaker should take action. I think he is on side with me in that regard, although he may be reluctant to admit it.

The House leader then went on to argue that the letter of the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel, Mr. Robert Walsh, to the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay, dealt mostly with potential consequences and hypothetical scenarios. I have to take serious exception with that characterization of Mr. Walsh's opinion. Mr. Walsh stated very clearly that with respect to compelling the production of documents for the purposes that were set out in the motion by the member for Peterborough, which has already been adopted by the committee, "such initiatives are not within the constitutional functions of the House or, by extension, its committees".

The committee has adopted that motion, it is seized with the study, there is absolutely nothing hypothetical about this. His attempt to characterize Mr. Walsh's opinion in the way that he did is really unfortunate because it is grossly inaccurate.

However, not satisfied with what he did with Mr. Walsh's matter, he then went on to do the same for one of the remarks that I made. The government House Leader said about my remark:

—the member for Windsor—Tecumseh premised much of his concern around the notion that the ethics committee would not be successful in keeping its proceedings in camera.

When I made reference to that, all I was doing was acknowledging that Mr. Walsh had raised the point.

• (1700)

My argument was entirely based on the fact that the breach had already occurred. It is not based just on the inevitability of the in camera proceedings being breached. The breach has already occurred. When that motion was passed, according to the opinion of Mr. Walsh, the breach occurred, the breach of the constitutional division of powers between the judiciary and the legislative wing of the government and the conventions that have grown up around that. It is not hypothetical, it has already occurred.

The House leader then went on and brought to your attention, Mr. Speaker, a portion of the ruling of Mr. Speaker Fraser, at page 9756 to 9758, of *Debates*, which I did not see any reason to bring up, although he seemed to accuse me for not doing so, simply because it was irrelevant. He is talking about some responsibility that I seem to be giving to you about controlling the chair. This is not an issue here. It is not the conduct of the chair that has any relevance to the procedural motion that I brought. The chair of that committee did absolutely nothing to breach the rules. It was the original motion being passed by the majority in that committee that breached the rules.

He went on to talk about somehow you intervening, Mr. Speaker, and having to control, which of course is not your responsibility, other than in extreme cases. We have no way of knowing about that, because all of this was done in camera, and I made no reference to it in any way. He raised a totally irrelevant point.

He went on with another mischaracterization. The government House leader claimed that the CBC's production of documents, as prescribed in the adopted motion, was voluntary. Let us look at this. Here is a line from the opening paragraph of the letter to the committee's chair that accompanied the documents in question. It had turned over certain documents to the committee earlier this week. It said:

Points of Order

While we have chosen to comply with the order...we do so under protest and with strong reservations about the purpose for which the documents have been requested.

That is not voluntary by any stretch of the imagination and it is absurd that it would be claimed to be so. It is like saying it is voluntary when an individual is being mugged and turns his or her wallet over at the point of a gun. That is what they were faced with and it was not voluntary at all.

I want to address a few comments about what the government House leader did, spending a great deal of time and energy setting out the proper process for the committee to compel documents through an order of the House. While very informative, the point of the lesson in the context of the question at hand escaped me. He claimed his point was that:

—that the appropriate time to be raising points about the proceedings of the ethics committee and how they may intersect with the sub justice convention would be at that time, that is to say, after any report from the ethics committee is presented.

While I agree with him that is one of the times we can do it, it is not the only time by any means. There are other appropriate times, and this is one of them. It is a very strong argument on my part.

In a situation like we have here, where we have, as found by the Law Clerk, a clear contravention of the Constitution and its conventions that have grown up under it, that is the time when you have the authority to intervene, Mr. Speaker, and I would submit strongly that you should do so in this case.

I want to make one additional point about the argument he made, and I think you raised it after I had made my argument on Monday, Mr. Speaker, about the normal practice of waiting for a report to come from committee before you make a ruling on a motion of this kind.

If we go back a bit and look at where that practice came from, and it is about a practice, the reason for it is it would be unfair to the Speaker in any given situation to ask him or her to make a ruling when the facts were not clear. If you have a report that has been passed by committee, it is before you, as the Speaker, you would clearly know what the facts are. You would have any number of cases where you as the Speaker would need that report in order to make a valid ruling. I acknowledge that.

That is not the situation we have here. There are only two facts that are of any relevance in terms of the breach of the mandate of the committee and it moving beyond its mandate. One is the motion itself, which we have. The second is we have the opinion of the Law Clerk, which says that motion, as passed by the committee, if carried out, would in fact be a breach of the Standing Orders and the practice in the House as well as the contravention of the Constitution and the conventions under it.

Two facts are all you really need, Mr. Speaker, to make your ruling: first, to recognize the motion that was passed in the standing committee; and second, the opinion of the Law Clerk that it is a breach of the Constitution.

• (1705)

In his final point, and I will make a couple of comments on this and then I will be finished, he urged the Speaker to wait. I think he was trying to argue a similar point, as was earlier said, that somehow the Speaker had to wait until the breach had occurred and the report

had come to the committee. As I have said in all the facts that I have already given you, Mr. Speaker, that is simply not a necessity in these circumstances.

I want to make this final point with regard to interpreting that motion, and that is the comments that have been made by the member for Peterborough, and I made reference to these in my opening argument. He has clearly said, as the motion also clearly demonstrates, that the committee would be substituting the role of the judiciary. Again, I go back to those words that I think are so damaging to the cause of the government side. The member for Peterborough said, "We are going to determine and assess the facts of the case behind closed doors". Those were his words.

In that regard, it is clear the judiciary in the country has that responsibility. It is clear under the Constitution. We could go through any number of pieces of legislation where it is clear. That is the role of the judiciary. It is clear in the Broadcast Act that it is its authority. It makes the interpretation, not a parliamentary committee.

Parliamentary committees make use of that, once that determination has been made in terms of whether there should be amendments to the legislation. However, the committees do not make that assessment. It is done by the judiciary.

I will conclude, Mr. Speaker, by again asking you to take into account the request I made with regard to how to dispose of this matter, either to declare the committee's work with regard to the study to be completely beyond its mandate or at the very least, as a fallback position, that it suspend any further study until such time as the courts have concluded, and that may include an appeal to the Supreme Court, their intervention in this matter.

• (1710)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will first deal with the question of disclosure that has been made by the CBC in forwarding documents.

My friend suggested that somehow this is not a voluntary disclosure but rather one that has been compelled. We have the unusual phenomenon before us where the corporation, which is required to disclose information under the law, has done so, but the opposition House leader is making the case that it should not have done so. It was the choice of the CBC to make that information available.

There was some information under seal which the CBC obviously believed to be of concern, but some that was not under seal and obviously CBC believed it to be open. The committee has not yet had an opportunity to turn its attention to those items to determine whether it is satisfied.

As I said earlier, Mr. Speaker, for any determination to be made by you in advance of the committee having decided whether the voluntary disclosure it has received is satisfactory would be premature. It would be highly unusual for you to offer an opinion in advance of the facts before you.

Government Orders

Further, the opposition House leader characterized, or mischaracterized, the parliamentary law clerk's letter as a finding. It is not a finding. It constitutes advice. My friend is a lawyer and I am trained in a similar fashion. We all know there are such things as legal opinions. We all know there is a diversity of legal opinions. We all know that unless they are made by a judge, or the Speaker in the context that we are in, or the chair of a committee in that context, they are not findings. They are merely letters of advice.

Not only has the member elevated it in his arguments to the level of a finding, he has created this very unusual device where he wants you, Mr. Speaker, to be the police officer to enforce his interpretation of what that legal advice is to the committee. That is a stretch many steps too far.

It is the member's interpretation of the law clerk's advice that he is now purporting you should make into an order that must be enforced. There is no such order. His interpretation, with the greatest of respect, is not one that is shared by others. It is certainly not an appropriate role for the Speaker to do that. It certainly is highly inappropriate for us to essentially displace the role of the Speaker by that of the law clerk and suggest that this advice somehow displaces any decisions that are made by the chair of the committee or by you, Mr. Speaker, ultimately as Speaker. Again, that is not appropriate.

The committee has the benefit of that advice. It can act on that advice and it can interpret that advice. It is the role of the chair and members of that committee to interpret that advice as masters of their own universe. It is not the member's place to provide that interpretation in a definitive fashion.

Similarly, Mr. Speaker, in asking you to deal with this, he is asking for an interpretation of law or of the Constitution. As you know, Mr. Speaker, there are abundant rulings, including some by yourself already in your short time as Speaker, that make it clear it is not the Speaker's role to interpret law or the Constitution.

Finally, I listened very carefully to my friend's arguments. He said that it was appropriate for the Speaker to intervene when there is a clear breach of a standing order. However, I do not see any here. I listened very carefully to my friend's arguments, but I did not hear him say what standing order had been breached. I would invite him to rise and state which standing order has been breached, and if there is none, I think that disposes of the question definitively.

The Speaker: I thank hon. members for their further submissions. I am taking the matter very seriously and will come back to the House with a decision in due time.

* * *

KEEPING CANADA'S ECONOMY AND JOBS GROWING ACT

The House resumed consideration of Bill C-13, An Act to implement certain provisions of the 2011 budget as updated on June 6, 2011 and other measures, as reported (without amendment) from the committee, and of the motions in Group No. 1.

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-13, the keeping Canada's economy and jobs growing act, a very important bill to residents in my riding of Richmond Hill and to all Canadians.

This bill builds on our government's commitment to continue the work over the last five years focusing on what matters most to Canadian families. It continues our long-term plan launched in 2006 to heighten Canada's advantages through a national economic road map that would truly make Canada a world economic leader and improve the quality of life for students, seniors, families and workers.

It is because of this government's prudent and visionary decisions since then that Canada has weathered the global economic turmoil of the last three years better than most other advanced countries. As we see the difficulties endured by so many other countries around the globe, we recognize that this strong, stable national majority Conservative government is acting swiftly to ensure that Canada's economy continues to grow and remain strong.

I would like to remind all hon. members in the House that before the global recession hit, our government paid down nearly \$40 billion of the debt to bring Canada's debt level to its lowest level in 25 years. We were well on our way to more competitive taxation levels. This is why we were able to act promptly to stimulate our economy as the downturn in the global economy necessitated appropriate action.

I am proud that under the leadership of our Prime Minister Canada currently has the strongest job growth record and the lowest net debt to GDP ratio in the entire G7. Both the International Monetary Fund and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development anticipate Canada to lead the way in economic growth over the next few years. The reason for this enviable record is that this government's top priority has always been the economy with a focus on a long-term low tax plan to create jobs and growth.

Despite our strong domestic economy, we remain in a period of heightened global uncertainty. As has been mentioned many times in the House, Canada is not immune from global economic turbulence. This is precisely why Bill C-13, the next phase of Canada's economic action plan, is so essential for Canada's continued economic stability. Bill C-13 invests in key areas that support job creation. Our government's priority has always been Canadian families, emphasizing help for students, seniors, families and communities, while maintaining our fiscal advantage.

Bill C-13 contains strategic investments that will contribute to the long-term economic growth and prosperity for Canadians.

Government Orders

One might ask how Bill C-13 will create jobs and economic growth. For one, it recognizes that it is the private sector that drives growth and wealth creation. We know that small- and medium-size businesses have been leading the way in job creation over the last two years. This is very important in Richmond Hill where 98% of all businesses are small or medium size, with the vast majority of those having less than 20 employees. This is why we will continue to support entrepreneurs and job creators in Richmond Hill and right across the country with key initiatives in the next phase of Canada's economic action plan, Bill C-13. Let me highlight a few.

A temporary \$1,000 hiring credit for small businesses will help up to 525,000 employers defray the costs of additional hiring. A two year extension of the accelerated capital cost allowance treatment for investments in manufacturing and processing machinery and equipment will support our manufacturers. The extension by 16 weeks of the work-sharing program will help employers going through a rough patch retain their employees and the skills they contribute to their businesses. A reduction in the increase of employment insurance premium rates in 2012 from 10¢ to 5¢ will stimulate job creation. Reducing unnecessary red tape through the continued work of the Red Tape Reduction Commission will allow entrepreneurs to focus on what they do best: growing their business and creating jobs.

• (1715)

Increased funding for the National Research Council's industrial research assistance program will support collaborative projects between colleges and businesses and will help strengthen our manufacturing sector by accelerating the adoption of information and communications technologies. Further reducing the corporate tax rate will make Canada very attractive as a place in which to invest and do business. In fact, Canada will have the lowest overall tax rates on new business investment in the G7, a fact of which I am very proud. Keeping taxes low allows our businesses to invest in their operations, creating much needed jobs for Canadians.

These are the very kinds of measures that will help small businesses like those in my riding of Richmond Hill. Nestled in the heart of the GTA, Richmond Hill is one of Canada's fastest growing and most diverse communities. It is a shining example of Canada's dynamic communities. Families, seniors, small- and medium-size businesses, organizations and the municipality find that the stability our government has infused into our economy is the key factor that has positioned us as world leaders throughout the global economic crisis.

This next phase of Canada's economic action plan, Bill C-13, continues to build on our strong economic policy with help for all Canadians and particularly for those who most need it, our seniors, our families and our communities.

For example, 680,000 low income seniors are benefiting from the enhancement to the guaranteed income supplement. Those who need it most are receiving an additional \$600 per year if single, and \$840 per year if a couple.

A new caregiver tax credit on up to \$2,000 will financially help those looking after loved ones with infirmities including for the first time, spouses, common-law partners and children.

Homeowners are being helped with the extension until March 31, 2012 of the eco-energy home retrofit program. Some \$400 million has been allocated across the country to help homeowners defray the costs of making their homes more energy efficient, an investment that at the same time is creating jobs and stimulating local economies.

A new children's arts tax credit on up to \$500 in eligible fees assists families with the costs associated with arts, cultural and developmental activities for their children. Arts, cultural and educational activities are very important in Canada, especially in my riding of Richmond Hill. Last week I was at Cosmo Music highlighting this very measure which is in effect for the 2011 taxation year. Parents in Richmond Hill are very pleased to know this kind of assistance is available to them. They appreciate knowing the value and recognition our government places on these types of activities.

I am also very pleased that Bill C-13 makes permanent the annual gas tax funding for municipalities each and every year. People will remember that it was this government that doubled this investment from \$1 billion to \$2 billion. Permanent gas tax funds give our municipal partners stable, predictable funding that they can count on to assist with their infrastructure needs. This is very significant particularly in Richmond Hill. As an example, the town can now expect over \$5 million each and every year and can incorporate this revenue into its budgetary process.

These and other measures in Bill C-13 continue to focus on what matters most in my riding and to all Canadians: creating jobs and promoting economic growth. We are maintaining our focus on the priorities set out in the next phase of Canada's economic action plan by supporting job creation and providing support for families, seniors and communities.

In closing, I call on all members in the House to support the important initiatives in this next phase of Canada's economic action plan that will continue on our nation's proven path of economic stability. I look forward to the passage of Bill C-13, the keeping Canada's economy and jobs growing act, and the benefits it will bring to all Canadians.

• (1720)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to what my colleague said and, again, it is obvious that the Conservatives are clearly out of touch with the needs of Canadian families. Canadians want real action on job creation, real action on hiring more doctors and nurses and real action on retirement security.

Fast-tracking this legislation, which is over 600 pages, is the wrong thing to do. We talked about this but I need to emphasize it again.

Government Orders

The fact of the matter is that there is an issue here with the economy, and the government is not acting on it. The government is going to make it harder for people who have to access EI.

Given the fact that the government is fast-tracking the bill, I am wondering if the member could tell me whether or not the government is looking at proroguing.

• (1725)

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Mr. Speaker, on the question of what we are doing for nurses, I would like to remind the member that built right into our economic action plan is the credit for nurses and doctors that would forgive their loans. That is very important in the northern regions of Canada.

Let me add that 600,000 new jobs have been created in Canada since July 2009 as a result of our government's ability to react when it was needed most to help Canadians.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important that the previous speaker recognize that since 2008 there are actually 500,000 fewer full-time jobs.

Housing is a very important issue in Winnipeg north, as I am sure it is in many communities across our country, whether it is housing for seniors or individuals on low income. We are looking for leadership from the government to deal with things such as housing co-ops, non-profit housing, house leases, different types of housing programs that would make it that much more affordable for home ownership.

Does the member have any comments on how he believes this budget would advance those types of issues?

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Mr. Speaker, we all know that the government has focused primarily on creating jobs with its low tax plan.

As far as housing is concerned, the member wanted me to point to something specific in the budget, and I will point specifically to the funding for the retrofit program, which has been extended. Canadian families from coast to coast to coast are availing themselves of this program. Over \$400 million in additional money has been allotted to that program. It is an excellent example of how our government is helping families cope with the costs of improving their homes.

Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the opposition is calling for higher taxes and reckless spending. We have seen this experiment in Greece and in Italy and it has not worked there.

Could the member explain to the opposition why that is not a good path to follow?

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Mr. Speaker, I am going to point specifically to our Minister of Finance who has been voted as the best finance minister in the world by his peers. The reason, in my humble opinion, he has that distinction and that recognition among his peers is that our finance minister, under the leadership of our Prime Minister and this government, has been able to react to changing global economic conditions quickly with this next phase of Canada's economic action plan. It is the best possible plan we could put in place at this point in time.

I urge all members in the House and my colleagues in the opposition to support this important legislation.

• (1730)

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is indeed an honour to rise in the House in support of Bill C-13, the keeping Canada's economy and jobs growing act.

It is also an honour to follow my friend from Richmond Hill, who so eloquently stated the reasons why the bill is so important for our country.

As the finance minister said early on in the introduction of the bill, our government is focused on what matters to Canadians: creating jobs and providing economic growth.

Canada has the strongest job growth in the G7, with nearly 600,000 net new jobs created since July 2009, and the IMF projects that we will have among the strongest economic growth in the G7 over the next two years.

As has been pointed out over and over again, we are not immune to global economic turbulence. That is why we need to stay the course and implement the next phase of Canada's economic action plan. Our government is focused on creating jobs and generating economic growth. Based on our economic performance compared with the rest of the world, it is truly working.

Our measures have been applauded by many in the private sector. For example, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business applauded the government's provision of a temporary hiring tax credit. Dan Kelly, the senior vice-president for the CFIB, said:

Since the 2011 budget announcement, many members have called about the credit and reported it will make it easier for them to hire, enhance wages or adjust to rising Employment Insurance premiums. ... This is a particularly important initiative as the government has declared 2011 as the Year of the Entrepreneur.

It is the entrepreneurs and the small business owners in this country who create the jobs this country needs.

The keeping Canada's economy and jobs growing act would help support Canada's economic recovery and would be promoting job creation and economic growth by implementing a whole host of measures like, as I pointed out a minute ago, providing a temporary hiring credit for small business and expanding tax support for clean energy generation to encourage green investments.

Coming from Manitoba as I do, I know that clean, green energy from Manitoba Hydro is very important to our economy, and this is what our government is supporting.

I was especially pleased to see the extension by one year of the mineral exploration tax credit for flow-through share investors to support Canada's mining sector. It is truly remarkable how the mining sector has come alive in Canada over the last decade and has become such an important contributor to our gross national product.

Government Orders

Indeed, that is why it is so shameful to see the NDP denigrating our country, denigrating the oil sands, when the oil sands are so important for our country and our economic growth. It is truly a shame that it is out to kill this most important enterprise. Having worked in the oil sands myself and lived in an oil sands camp, I have experienced first-hand the men and women of Canada who are working in the oil sands, providing for their families, saving for their children's education, and on and on. It is truly a remarkable Canadian achievement, and it is truly disgraceful to see the NDP doing whatever it can to kill this engine of economic growth.

We are also simplifying customs tariffs in order to facilitate trade. Canada is a trading nation. Trade is what supports our economy and, in turn, what supports the social programs that all Canadians need.

We are accelerating the capital cost allowance.

This is something I am kind of interested in. We are eliminating the mandatory retirement age for federally regulated employees in order to give older workers wishing to work the option of remaining in the workforce. That is something that many of us are clearly looking forward to.

In terms of supporting communities, our bill would legislate a permanent annual investment of \$2 billion in the gas tax fund to provide predictable, long-term infrastructure funding for municipalities. I represent a remote rural constituency with many municipalities, and this fund that our government has doubled in the last few years is vital to the maintenance of important infrastructure for my communities.

We are enhancing the wage earner protection program.

• (1735)

Here is one that was especially well received in my constituency and indeed across the country. We are introducing a volunteer firefighters tax credit for volunteer firefighters. This is an example of how the government supports communities. Our volunteer firefighters give of their time. For many years they were the unsung heroes of many of our communities. We are so proud to have provided the volunteer firefighters tax credit, something they have requested for many years, which in a sure but small way recognizes the contributions they are making to our communities. That is what community is all about and what the government supports.

We will be increasing the ability of Canadians to give more confidently to legitimate charities.

With regard to the family caregiver tax credit, we are removing the limit on the amount of eligible expenses caregivers can claim under the medical expense tax credit.

We are introducing a new children's arts tax credit for programs associated with children's artistic, cultural, recreational and developmental activities.

This is truly an incredible list of what the government is doing. It includes forgiving loans for new doctors and nurses in underserved rural and remote areas. As a member of Parliament, like many of my colleagues I represent a remote rural constituency. Health care is very important. Providing incentives to new doctors and nurses to

live and work in our beautiful rural communities will only help to strengthen them.

We will be helping apprentices and skilled trades and workers in regulated professions by making occupational trade and professional examination fees eligible for the tuition tax credit.

We will be improving federal financial assistance for students.

We are making it easier to allocate registered education savings plan assets among siblings without incurring tax penalties or forfeiting Canada education savings grants.

The phasing out of the direct subsidy of political parties is something I am pleased to see. As we listened to the members of the NDP early in the debate on this particular bill, I was astonished that all they focused on was this tax giveaway to political parties, which to their minds is a big deal. I guess free money is what they are all about, whereas the members of our party have worked hard. We have attracted donations from thousands of small donors and have built up a strong base of funding. We earned it. They want it for nothing. That is the difference between us and them. I am pleased to support the phasing out of the direct subsidy of political parties.

We will be closing numerous tax loopholes that allow a few businesses and individuals to avoid paying their fair share of tax.

In terms of Manitoba in particular, as all members in the House know, all politics is local. I am especially pleased with what Manitoba will see come out of the bill. There will be \$5,000 in grants from the energy program for Manitoba families to make their homes more energy efficient; \$840 in new annual financial support for needy Manitoba seniors; the new family caregivers tax credit; and, this is one that is especially important in my constituency although the point is somewhat moot now, the waiving of licence renewal fees for hunters and firearms owners. Thank goodness this will be a thing of the past once the bill is passed.

I thank the hardworking Minister of Public Safety, another Manitoba MP I might add, who is spearheading this particular initiative, along with the member for Portage—Lisgar.

In terms of agriculture, and I represent a very strong agricultural community, help for Manitoba farmers will be provided by the new \$50 million agricultural innovation initiative. Our agriculture is only strengthened by research and innovation. That is why Canadian producers are among the most efficient in the world.

I could go on with the number of initiatives that are in our budget. I will say that this is a good budget for Canada and all of our citizens. It is our low tax plan for jobs and economic growth.

• (1740)

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Madam Speaker, yesterday, the Task Force on Competitiveness, Productivity and Economic Progress released its most recent report tracking Ontario's economic progress. The report states that Ontario lost 300,000 manufacturing jobs between 2007 and 2009 and that everyone knows that these jobs are not coming back. This flies in the face of all the numbers the Tories like to trot out. I wonder if the member opposite can speak to this disconnect between the facts and what his government keeps talking about.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Madam Speaker, there is no disconnect between the facts and our performance.

One need only look at who is in government in Ontario: the poster child for a high tax economy that does not create jobs. Ontario used to be the engine of the Canadian economy and could be still, if the proper policies were put in place. High taxes and the excess spending of government funds simply do not work and Ontario shows that.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, when the member from Dauphin made reference to hydro, it really made me sit up and listen. We in Manitoba have a passion for Manitoba hydro because it is a wonderful opportunity for economic development.

This is a billion dollar question, maybe even a bit more than that. I wonder if the member could provide any comment on his thoughts on east side versus west side for the Bipole III transmission line for Manitoba Hydro.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Madam Speaker, I share the member's concern regarding the choice the Manitoba government has made. The Manitoba NDP government chose to build a hydro line along the west side of Manitoba that will cost an extra \$1 billion to build, rather than the shorter east side line.

The extra distance causes a line loss of enough electricity to power 25,000 homes, or a community the size of Brandon, Manitoba. That represents \$1 billion of excess spending by the Manitoba NDP. Year after year enough energy to power 25,000 homes will simply go up in smoke for nothing.

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Madam Speaker, given the member's reputation as a strong environmentalist working with corporations to ensure that the environment and industry work together, could he comment?

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Madam Speaker, one of the things that is evident, when one looks at environmental indicators around the world, is that as a country gets richer the environmental indicators get better. There is no trade-off between wealth creation, economic growth and environmental quality; they all go hand in hand.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:45 p.m., pursuant to an order made earlier today it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the report stage of the bill now before the House.

• (1745)

[Translation]

The question is on Motion No. 1. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Government Orders

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: The recorded division on Motion No. 1 stands deferred.

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP) moved: That Bill C-13 be amended by deleting Clause 181.

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on Motion No. 2. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: The recorded division on the motion stands deferred.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP) moved:

That Bill C-13, in Clause 181, be amended

(a) by replacing line 23 on page 206 with the following:

"April 1, 2012 and the eleven following"

(b) by replacing line 26 on page 206 with the following:

"April 1, 2016 and the eleven following"

(c) by replacing line 29 on page 206 with the following:

"April 1, 2020 and the eleven following"

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP) moved:

That Bill C-13 be amended by deleting Clause 182.

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on Motion No. 4. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Government Orders

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: The recorded division on the motion stands deferred.

The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded divisions at report stage of Bill C-13.

Call in the members.

• (1820)

[Translation]

The Speaker: The question is on Motion No. 1.

• (1830)

[English]

(The House divided on Motion No. 1, which was negated on the following division:)

(Division No. 57)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Angus
Atamanenko	Aubin
Bélanger	Bellavance
Bennett	Benskin
Bevington	Blanchette
Blanchette-Lamothe	Boivin
Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet
Brahmi	Brisson
Brosscau	Byrne
Caron	Casey
Cash	Charlton
Chicoine	Chow
Christopherson	Cleary
Coderre	Comartin
Côté	Cotler
Crowder	Cuzner
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Day
Dion	Dionne Labelle
Donnelly	Doré Lefebvre
Dubé	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Dussault
Easter	Eyking
Fortin	Freeman
Garneau	Garrison
Génest-Jourdain	Giguère
Godin	Goodale
Grogan	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Harris (St. John's East)	Hsu
Hughes	Ilyer
Jacob	Julian
Kellway	Lamoureux
Lapointe	Larose
Latendresse	Laverdière
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)	Mai
Marston	Martin
Masse	Mathysen
May	McCallum
McGuinity	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Michaud	Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)

Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)	Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)	Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Nantel	Nash
Nicholls	Nunez-Melo
Pacetti	Papillon
Patry	Pécelet
Perreault	Pilon
Plamondon	Quach
Rac	Rafferty
Ravignat	Raynault
Regan	Rousseau
Sandhu	Savoie
Scarpaleggia	Sellah
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)	
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	
St-Denis	Stewart
Stoffer	Sullivan
Thibault	Toone
Tremblay	Trudeau
Turnel	Valeriote — 116

NAYS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Aglukkaq
Albas	Albrecht
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Ambler	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Armstrong	Ashfield
Aspin	Bateman
Benoit	Bernier
Bezan	Blaney
Block	Boughen
Braid	Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooeg
Butt	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan
Carmichael	Carrie
Chisu	Chong
Clarke	Clement
Daniel	Davidson
Dechert	Del Mastro
Devolin	Dreesen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Dykstra
Fantino	Fast
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)	Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Fletcher	Galipeau
Gallant	Gill
Glover	Goguen
Goldring	Goodyear
Gosal	Gourde
Grewal	Harper
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hayes
Hiebert	Hillier
Hoback	Hoeppner
Holder	Jamex
Jean	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kent	Kerr
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lake	Lauzon
Lebel	Lee
Lemieux	Leung
Lizon	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Mayes	McColeman
McLeod	Menegakis
Menzies	Merrifield
Miller	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Norlock
O'Connor	O'Neill Gordon
Oda	Oliver
Opitz	Paradis
Payne	Penashuc
Poillievre	Preston
Raitt	Rajotte
Rattheber	Reid
Rempel	Richards
Richardson	Rickford

Ritz	Schellenberger
Seebuck	Shea
Shipley	Shory
Smith	Sopuck
Sorenson	Stanton
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Tilson
Toet	Toews
Trost	Trotter
Truppe	Tweed
Uppal	Valcourt
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vellacott	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	Wilks
Williamson	Wong
Woodworth	Yelich
Young (Oakville)	Young (Vancouver South)
Zimmer— 157	

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare Motion No. 1 lost. The next question is on Motion No. 2. A negative vote on Motion No. 2 necessitates the question being put on Motion No. 3.

● (1840)

[Translation]

(The House divided on Motion No. 2, which was negated on the following division:)

(Division No. 58)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Angus
Atamanenko	Aubin
Bellavance	Benskin
Bevington	Blanchette
Blanchette-Lamothe	Boivin
Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet
Brahmi	Brossseau
Caron	Cash
Charlton	Chicoine
Chow	Christopherson
Cleary	Comartin
Côté	Crowder
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Mai
Dionne Labelle	Donnelly
Doré Lefebvre	Dubé
Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona)	Dussault
Fortin	Freeman
Garrison	Genest-Jourdain
Giguère	Godin
Grogulé	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Harris (St. John's East)	Hughes
Hyer	Jacob
Julian	Kellway
Lapointe	Larose
Latendresse	Laverdière
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)	Mai
Marston	Martin
Masse	Mathysen
May	Michaud
Moore (Abitibi Témiscamingue)	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Laurentides -Labelle)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	Nantel
Nash	Nicholls
Nunez-Melo	Papillon
Patry	Péclet
Perrault	Pilon
Plamondon	Quach
Rafferty	Ravignat
Raynault	Roussseau
Sandhu	Savoie
Sellah	Sims (Newton—North Delta)

St-Denis
Stoffer
Thibault
Tremblay

Ablonczy
Adler
Albas
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Ambler
Anders
Armstrong
Aspin
Bélanger
Benoit
Bezan
Block
Braid
Brisson
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Brunoogoe
Byrne
Calkins
Carmichael
Casey
Chong
Clement
Cotler
Daniel
Dechert
Devolin
Dresshen
Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Easter
Fantino
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Fletcher
Gallant
Gill
Goguen
Goodale
Gosal
Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hiebert
Hoback
Holder
James
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kerr
Kramp (Prince Edward Hastings)
Lamoureux
Lebel
Lemieux
Lizon
Lukiwski
MacKay (Central Nova)
Mayes
McColeman
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Menegakis
Merrifield
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Norlock
O'Neill Gordon
Oliver
Pacetti
Payne
Poileuvre
Rac
Rajotte
Regan
Rempel
Richardson
Ritz
Schellenberger
Shea

Government Orders

Stewart
Sullivan
Toone
Turnell— 90

NAYS

Members

Adams
Aglukkaq
Albrecht
Allison
Ambrose
Anderson
Ashfield
Bateman
Bennett
Bernier
Blaney
Boughen
Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)
Butt
Calandra
Cannan
Carrie
Chisu
Clarke
Coderre
Cuzner
Davidson
Del Mastro
Dion
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Dykestra
Eyking
Fast
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Galipeau
Garneau
Glover
Goldring
Goodyear
Gourde
Harper
Hayes
Hillyer
Hooppner
Ilsu
Jean
Koddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kent
Komarnicki
Lake
Lauzon
Lecf
Leung
Lobb
Lunney
MacKenzie
McCallum
McGuinity
McLeod
Menzies
Miller
O'Connor
Oda
Opitz
Paradis
Penashue
Preston
Raitt
Rathgeber
Reid
Richards
Rickford
Scarpaleggia
Seebuck
Shipley

Government Orders

Shory sor)	Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
Smith	Sopuck
Sorenson	Stanton
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Tilson
Toet	Toews
Trost	Trotter
Trudeau	Truppe
Tweed	Uppal
Valcourt	Valeriote
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vellacott	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Sky Country)	Wilks
Weston (Saint John)	Wong
Williamson	Yelich
Woodworth	Young (Vancouver South)
Young (Oakville)	
Zimmer— 183	

Dionne Labelle
Doré Lefebvre
Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Dussault
Eyking
Freeman
Garrison
Giguère
Goodale
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Hsu
Hyer
Julian
Lamoureux
Larose
Laverdière
Mai
Martin
Mathyssen
McCallum
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bago)
Nash
Nunez-Melo
Papillon
Pécllet
Pilon
Quach
Rafferty
Raynault
Rousseau
Savoie
Sellah sor)
Sims (Newton—North Delta)
Stewart
Sullivan
Toone
Trudeau
Valeriote— 117

Donnelly
Dubé
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Easter
Fortin
Gameau
Genest-Jourdain
Godin
Grogulic
Harris (St. John's East)
Hughes
Jacob
Kellway
Lapointe
Latendresse
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Marston
Masse
May
McGuinity
Michaud
Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Nantel
Nicholls
Pascetti
Patry
Perreault
Plamondon
Rae
Ravignat
Regan
Sandhu
Scarpaleggia
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
St-Denis
Stoffer
Thibeault
Tremblay
Tumel

Nil

The Speaker: I declare Motion No. 2 lost.

The next question is on Motion No. 3.

[English]

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.**Some hon. members:** No.**The Speaker:** All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.**Some hon. members:** Yea.**The Speaker:** All those opposed will please say nay.**Some hon. members:** Nay.**The Speaker:** In my opinion the nays have it.*And five or more members having risen:*

● (1850)

[Translation]

(The House divided on Motion No. 3, which was negated on the following division:)

*(Division No. 59)***YEAS****Members**

Allen (Welland)	Angus
Atamanenko	Aubin
Bélanger	Bellavance
Bennett	Benskin
Bevington	Blanchette
Blanchette-Lamothe	Boivin
Borg	Boudierice
Boulin-Sweet	Brahmi
Brisson	Brossseau
Byrne	Caron
Casey	Cash
Charlton	Chicoine
Chow	Christopherson
Cleary	Coderre
Comartin	Côté
Cotler	Crowder
Cuzner	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Daly	Dion

Ablończy
Adler
Albas
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Ambler
Anders
Armstrong
Aspin
Benoit
Bezan
Block
Braid
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)
Butt
Calkins
Carmichael
Chisu
Clarke
Daniel
Dechert
Devolin
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Fantino
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Fletcher
Gallant
Glover
Goldring
Gosal
Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hiebert
Hoback
Holder
Jean
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Adams
Aghukkaq
Albrecht
Allison
Ambrose
Andersoa
Ashfield
Bateman
Bernier
Blaney
Boughen
Breitekreuz
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Bruinooige
Calandra
Cannan
Carrie
Chong
Clement
Davidson
Del Mastro
Dreeshen
Dykstra
Fast
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Galipeau
Gill
Goguen
Goodyear
Gourde
Harper
Hayes
Hillyer
Hoeppner
James
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)

NAYS**Members**

Kent	Kerr
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lake	Lauzon
Lebel	Leef
Lemieux	Leung
Lizon	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunnery
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Mayes	McColeman
McLeod	Menegakis
Menzies	Merrifield
Miller	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Norlock
O'Connor	O'Neill Gordon
Oda	Oliver
Opitz	Paradis
Payne	Penashue
Poillievre	Preston
Raït	Rajotte
Rathgeber	Reid
Rempel	Richards
Richardson	Rickford
Ritz	Schellenberger
Seckack	Shea
Shipley	Shory
Smith	Sopuck
Sorenson	Stanton
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Tilson
Toet	Toews
Trost	Trottier
Truppe	Tweed
Uppal	Valcourt
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vellacott	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Sky Country)	Wilks
Weston (Saint John)	Wong
Williamson	Yelich
Woodworth	Young (Vancouver South)
Young (Oakville)	
Zimmer— 157	

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare Motion No. 3 lost.

The next question is on Motion No. 4.

● (1900)

(The House divided on Motion No. 4, which was negated on the following division:)

(Division No. 60)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Angus
Atamanenko	Aubin
Bellavance	Benskin
Bevington	Blanchette
Blanchette-Lamothé	Boivin
Borg	Boulérice
Boutin-Sweet	Brahmi
Brousseau	Caron
Cash	Charlton
Chicoine	Chow
Christopherson	Cleary
Comartin	Côté
Crowder	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Day	Dionne Labelle
Donnelly	Doré Lefebvre
Dubé	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dusseault	Fortin
Freeman	Garrison
Genest-Jourdain	Giguère
Godin	Grogueh
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)	Harris (St. John's East)

Hughes	Hyer
Jacob	Julian
Kellway	Lapointe
Larose	Latendresse
Laverdière	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Mai	Marston
Martin	Masse
Mathysen	May
Michaud	Moore (Abitibi Témiscamingue)
Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)	Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Morin (Laurentides Labelle)	Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Nantel	Nash
Nicholls	Nunez-Melo
Papillon	Patry
Péclot	Perrault
Pilon	Planondon
Quach	Rafferty
Ravignat	Raynault
Rousseau	Sandhu
Savoie	Sellah
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	St-Denis
Stewart	Stoffer
Sullivan	Thibault
Toone	Tremblay
Tumel— 91	

Government Orders

NAYS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Aghukkaq
Albas	Albrecht
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Ambler	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Armstrong	Ashfield
Aspin	Bateman
Bélanger	Bennett
Benoit	Bernier
Bezan	Blaney
Block	Boughen
Braid	Breitkreuz
Brison	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Brown (Barrie)
Brunooge	Butt
Byrne	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan
Carmichael	Carrie
Casey	Chisu
Chong	Clarke
Clement	Codger
Cotler	Cuzner
Daniel	Davidson
Dechert	Del Mastro
Devoilin	Dion
Dreschen	Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Dykstra
Easter	Eyking
Fantino	Fast
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)	Finley (Ialdimand—Norfolk)
Fletcher	Galipeau
Gallant	Garncau
Gill	Glover
Goguen	Goldring
Goodale	Goodyear
Gosal	Gourde
Grewal	Harper
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hayes
Hiebert	Hillyer
Hoback	Hoeppner
Holder	Hsu
James	Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lamoureux	Lauzon
Lebel	Leef
Lemieux	Leung
Lizon	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunnery
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Mayes	McCallum

Government Orders

McColeman	McGuinity
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	McLeod
Menegakis	Menzies
Merrifield	Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Norlock	O'Connor
O'Neill Gordon	Oda
Oliver	Opitz
Pacetti	Paradis
Payne	Penashue
Poilièvre	Preston
Rac	Raitt
Rajotte	Rathgeber
Regan	Reid
Rempel	Richards
Richardson	Rickford
Ritz	Scarpaleggia
Schellenberger	Seeback
Shea	Shipley
Shory	Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
son)	
Smith	Sopuck
Sorenson	Stanton
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Tilson
Toet	Toews
Trost	Trottier
Truppe	Tweed
Uppal	Valcourt
Valerioté	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vellacott
Wallace	Warawa
Warkentin	Watson
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	
Wilks	Williamson
Wong	Woodworth
Yelich	Young (Oakville)
Young (Vancouver South)	Zimmer — 182

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare Motion No. 4 lost.

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (for the Minister of Finance) moved that the bill be concurred in.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

• (1905)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 61)

YEAS

Members

Abonczy	Adams
Adler	Agluckaq
Albas	Albrecht
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Amblar	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Armstrong	Ashfield
Aspin	Bateman
Benoit	Bernier
Bezan	Blaney
Block	Boughen
Braid	Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Brown (Barrie)	Brunooge
Butt	Calandra
Calkins	Caman
Carmichael	Carrie
Chisu	Chong
Clarke	Clement
Daniel	Davidson
Dechert	Del Mastro
Devoilin	Dreeschen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Dykstra
Fantino	Fast
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)	Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Fletcher	Galipeau
Gallant	Gill
Glover	Goyen
Goldring	Goodyear
Gosal	Gourde
Grewal	Harper
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hayes
Hiebert	Hillyer
Hoback	Hoepfner
Holder	James
Jean	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kent	Kerr
Kornarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lake	Lauzon
Lebel	Leaf
Lemieux	Leung
Lizon	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Mayes	McColeman
McLeod	Menegakis
Menzies	Merrifield
Miller	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Norlock
O'Connor	O'Neill Gordon
Oda	Oliver
Opitz	Paradis
Payne	Penashue
Poilièvre	Preston
Raitt	Rajotte
Rathgeber	Reid
Rempel	Richards
Richardson	Rickford
Ritz	Schellenberger
Seeback	Shea
Shipley	Shory
Smith	Sopuck
Sorenson	Stanton
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Tilson
Toet	Toews
Trost	Trottier
Truppe	Tweed
Uppal	Valcourt
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vellacott	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	Wilks
Williamson	Wong
Woodworth	Yelich

Young (Oakville)
Zimmer — 157

Young (Vancouver South)

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Angus
Atamanenko	Aubin
Bélanger	Beilivance
Bennett	Benskin
Bevington	Blanchette
Blanchette-Lamothe	Boivin
Borg	Boudette
Boutin-Sweet	Brahmi
Brisson	Brousseau
Byrne	Caron
Cassey	Cash
Charlton	Chicoine
Chow	Christopherson
Cleary	Coderre
Comartin	Côté
Cotler	Crowder
Cuzner	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Day	Dion
Dionne Labelle	Donnelly
Doré Lefebvre	Dubé
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dussault	Easter
Eyking	Fortin
Freeman	Garneau
Garrison	Genest-Jourdain
Giguère	Godin
Goodale	Grogulé
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)	Harris (St. John's East)
Ilsu	Hughes
Hyer	Jacob
Julian	Kellway
Lamoureux	Lapointe
Larose	Latendresse
Laverdière	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Mai	Marston
Martin	Masse
Mathysen	May
McCallum	McGuinty
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	Michaud
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	Nantel
Nash	Nicholls
Nunez-Melo	Pacetti
Papillon	Patry
Péctet	Perreault
Pilon	Plamondon
Quach	Rac
Rafferty	Ravignat
Raynault	Regan
Rousseau	Sandhu
Savoie	Scarpaleggia
Sellahsor	Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	St-Denis
Stewart	Stoffer
Sullivan	Thibault
Toone	Tremblay
Turnel	Valériote — 116

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

I wish to inform the House that because of the delay, there will be no private members' hour today.

[Translation]

Therefore, the order is deferred to a future sitting.

Adjournment Proceedings

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

● (1910)

[Translation]

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. Tarik Brahmi (Saint-Jean, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in June, I asked the Minister of Industry to explain the measures being taken by the government to ensure that Canadian families across the board are not being fleeced by fluctuating gas prices. At the time, the minister told me he had referred the issue of fluctuating gas prices to the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology. Indeed, the committee agreed to study the matter, but, as the hon. member for Windsor West pointed out at the time, similar studies had already been done.

Ongoing analysis is certainly useful, but when the results do not translate into any measures for Canadians, then it is clear that the government is using delay tactics instead of taking concrete measures, such as those advocated by the NDP for Canadian families.

These are harsh economic times. Families are finding it increasingly difficult to make ends meet, and thousands of jobs are being lost in Canada every day. The rising cost of living is hitting families harder all the time, and they are struggling to cope.

Unfortunately, this country does not have a national public transit strategy and communities are being underserved. For example, in my riding of Saint-Jean, we are completely dependent on cars and therefore on the price of gasoline. The same goes for most Canadians. Gasoline is not a luxury item. It is a necessity for getting to work and even for looking for work. This government keeps telling us over and over again that it was elected to create jobs, but in the meantime, it is doing nothing to make life easier for job seekers, the unemployed and workers.

We have an oil industry with very few players, and families have to endure fluctuations that have less to do with supply and demand and more to do with pure speculation. In the end, the oil companies are getting richer and families are getting poorer.

[English]

There is a serious impact on the Canadian economy, and just one example is the effect on Canadian tourism.

Let me tell the House a story. Just this morning my office heard from a woman who would soon be retiring and after many years of dedicated work, she looked forward to travelling in her RV. She has chosen to travel in the United States rather than in Canada because gas prices are simply too high in Canada.

Many Canadian families are being confronted with the reality of paying much more for gas in Canada. They choose to travel south rather than right here at home.

At a time when we want to boost our economy, inaction on this issue is not only unwise, but it is unfair when so many Canadian families are struggling.

Adjournment Proceedings

[Translation]

Canadians have no choice but to live with random fluctuations and steady increases in the price of gas. We are left to wonder who in this government is doing anything to protect consumers.

It is time to act. It is time for this government to take immediate action.

Canadians want answers and they want action. What concrete measures will the government take to protect consumers from fluctuating gas prices?

[English]

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to remind all hon. members of the House that this government is committed to taking action to ensure Canadian businesses and consumers prosper in a competitive and innovative marketplace.

The Commissioner of Competition has considerable powers to investigate the actions of all businesses and individuals when there is evidence that there may have been a violation of Canada's competition laws. These powers were strengthened by recent amendments to the Competition Act, providing the commissioner additional powers to attack cartel behaviour that is the most harmful to competition.

With regard to the petroleum industry, it is clear that when the Competition Bureau finds evidence of behaviour that violates the Competition Act, it has not hesitated to fully pursue the appropriate enforcement action allowed under the act to protect competition and consumers.

For instance, in 2008, and again in 2010, following an investigation by the Competition Bureau, charges were laid under the Competition Act against 38 individuals and 14 companies accused of fixing the price of gas at the pump in four markets in Quebec. As a result, to date, 13 individuals and 6 companies have pleaded guilty in this case, with fines totalling over \$2.8 million. Six of these individuals have been sentenced to terms of imprisonment totalling 54 months.

I would also remind the House that the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology has repeatedly reviewed trends in gasoline prices in Canada.

A recommendation from a previous report of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology concerning gasoline prices in Canada was that the Government of Canada create and fund a petroleum monitoring agency to collect and disseminate price data on crude oil, refined petroleum products and retail gasoline for all relevant North American markets.

Since that time, our government has been proactive in providing Canadians with information on gas prices and industry trends. In that regard, I would refer the hon. member and all Canadians to the energy sector of Natural Resources Canada, which acts as the lead on energy policy for the Government of Canada. It produces Fuel Focus, a report providing Canadians with valuable information on a regular basis regarding various aspects of the gasoline market in Canada and the economic factors influencing prices.

The report, released every second Friday, provides an overview of gasoline prices in selected Canadian cities, a comparison of gasoline prices between selected Canadian and competing American centres, trends in refining and marketing margins and costs and an overview of events influencing world crude oil prices. The report also provides insight into other related topics to help better understand gasoline markets, including consumer-related information to help reduce energy costs.

Through Natural Resources Canada's energy sector, the government has taken action to assist Canadian consumers in understanding what is taking place in this complex market. In addition, the Competition Bureau, through the principled enforcement of the Competition Act, continues to guard against anti-competitive activity in this and other sectors of the Canadian economy.

This government has also acted to ensure that Canadians get what they pay for at the pump. We passed the Fairness at the Pumps Act, which will protect consumers from inaccuracies at the pump. This government has acted and we will continue to act in the best interests of Canadians.

• (1915)

[Translation]

Mr. Tarik Brahmi: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague across the floor for his answers, which are definitely concrete, but practically speaking, simply providing consumers with information regarding the state of price increases does not solve the problem. Just because the government produces reports on margins and fluctuating prices and gives that information to Canadians does not change the fact that some price fluctuations are unjustified. Canadians expect the government to take specific action in order to gain some sort of control over those fluctuations, and not simply that it give them information.

When will this government finally take action that produces results instead of simply giving information?

[English]

Mr. Mike Lake: Madam Speaker, I find the NDP position on this file a bit contradictory. Both the NDP and Liberals opposed the GST tax cut, the decrease from 7% to 6% to 5%, which helps to keep Canadians' money where it belongs, in their own pocket. It is also interesting that the hon. member wants to talk about high prices when he knows that his own party's policies would impose a costly carbon tax on Canadians that would see gas prices skyrocket. Jack Mintz, a respected economist, has stated that the NDP's plan would result in a 10¢ hike in gas prices.

In addition, the government has already taken action to protect consumers by recently passing the Fairness at the Pumps Act. The act protects consumers from inaccurate measurements when buying gasoline and will ensure that consumers get what they pay for.

Moreover, as we have seen with the charges laid in Quebec in 2008 and 2010, when the Competition Bureau finds evidence of behaviour that violates the Competition Act, it does not hesitate to take law enforcement action to protect competition and consumers.

Clearly, the government recognizes the importance of this issue to Canadians and is committed to ensuring a strong, independently enforced legislative framework exists to guard against anti-competitive behaviour. These are concrete measures that we are very proud of over here.

• (1920)

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: Since the hon. member for Ottawa—Vanier is not present in the House to raise a question during the adjournment debate, his notice is deemed to have been withdrawn

The hon. member for Terrebonne—Blainville.

POVERTY

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Madam Speaker, on October 18, I rose in the House to talk about the problem of growing poverty in the suburbs of Canadian cities, particularly in Quebec. More specifically, I rose to ask the Conservative government's Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development a very simple question: When will the government bring forward a real plan to fight poverty?

This issue is particularly close to my heart because I am proud to represent the suburban communities of Terrebonne and Blainville. What I have seen in my riding is both encouraging and discouraging. I am pleased to see the daily dedication of the many community organizations that, with limited resources and funds, provide essential services to people affected by poverty. However, I am discouraged when I hear the increasing number of stories about good citizens sucked down into poverty and when I see that these heroic community organizations do not have the resources or the time to serve everyone effectively. Of course, the minister chose to avoid answering my question and defended the government's introduction of job training programs during the recession and the 2% cut to the GST.

That response was both evasive and inadequate. It was evasive because lowering the GST is not an anti-poverty strategy since it helps only the wealthiest people. It was inadequate because, although these skills training programs are important, they do not constitute an intelligent policy to fight poverty. They are not a long-term strategy to combat poverty with measurable objectives and they do not include a plan to coordinate initiatives among all departments or to implement accountability mechanisms. The proof is in the numbers.

Let us talk about the numbers. Today, the use of food banks has gone up by 26% since 2008. The unemployment rate remains at 7.3%, and has gone down only slightly since the recession. There are 136,000 fewer jobs for people between the ages of 15 and 24 than there were before the recession. Only 50% of Canadians experienced any true increase in their income over the past 30 years, while the income of the richest 0.1% of Canadians tripled. The average household debt to income ratio is now over 150% and the poorest Canadians are the primary victims of such debt.

Adjournment Proceedings

We also know that housing prices and rents have risen dramatically across Canada, especially in downtown areas. Therefore, it is not surprising that pockets of poverty are becoming more common in the suburbs, where low-income families can find slightly less expensive housing. However, they still cannot make ends meet. A study conducted by the Vieille-Capitale health and social service centre reported this trend in Quebec City.

What are the effects of such growing inequality and increasing poverty? Scientific research has concluded that there is a direct link between income disparity and poor mental and physical health, addiction, poor school performance and increased crime. Faced with this compelling evidence and the complete failure of this government to bring forward a plan to tackle increasing poverty and inequality, the minister had no choice but to avoid my question.

[English]

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased that the member for Terrebonne—Blainville has given me this opportunity to explain our government's recovery plan.

I could not help but notice the difference between our party and theirs. She talks about more meetings, discussions and debates; we actually prefer action, and that is what we have done.

The Canadian economy is emerging from one of the worst economic crises that we have seen since the Great Depression. It is obvious that Canada's recovery is the strongest among all the G7 countries. In other words, the targeted measures in the first phase of our economic action plan are working, and we are on the right road.

That is not to say that the economic problems other countries are facing will not have repercussions on our own economy. The recovery is still fragile.

The best protection against poverty is a strong economy, not more meetings and more discussion, and the best guarantee of a strong economy is job creation. That is why jobs and the economy are going to continue to be our priority.

We want the best for our fellow Canadians. We are investing in programs to promote growth and create jobs, programs such as the one-time hiring credit for small business.

We are investing in programs for Canadian families. We provide over \$14 billion per year in benefits for families with children.

We are investing in programs for caregivers. For example, we estimate that more than 500,000 caregivers will benefit from the family caregiver tax credit.

We are investing in programs for the working poor. We provide over \$1 billion per year in the working income tax benefit, which helps to ensure that low-income Canadians are financially better off when they get a job.

Adjournment Proceedings

We are investing in programs for our seniors, who have worked hard to build our country. For example, budget 2011 increased the guarantee income supplement for seniors who have little or no income, and that will benefit more than 680,000 seniors.

We are investing in programs for Canadian workers who have been laid off with measures such as the targeted initiative for older workers, which has helped close to 16,000 people.

We are investing in programs that promote education and skills training, because those are the key to economic independence and prosperity for everyone.

We are looking for ways to harmonize these investments with balanced budgets, yet without imposing a tax hike on hard-working Canadians.

The unfortunate thing is that the member opposite and her party have opposed virtually every one of these initiatives.

• (1925)

[Translation]

Ms. Charmaine Borg: Madam Speaker, we have voted against them because tax credits are of absolutely no help to people who have no income. These are people who are living on the streets, who cannot work, who cannot find jobs.

I am sorry, but this plan does not work; just look at the 76,000 jobs that were lost in a month. They do not have a plan, but they do not want to admit it. The government's obsession with tax credits and reductions does nothing for low-income Canadians because these people do not pay taxes. The government's tax reduction program for big business has done nothing to reduce the unemployment rate or improve the quality of jobs. What is more, this government has not invested any new money in social housing to improve social and urban diversity and reduce the tax burden.

I am proud to be part of the NDP, which introduced real plans to fight poverty during the last Parliament, such as Bill C-545 and Bill C-304.

[English]

Mr. David Anderson: Madam Speaker, Canadians gave us a clear, strong mandate.

They want us to respect the money they make and they want us to respect the money that we receive in taxes. They want us to spend it very wisely.

The best way to fight poverty is to get Canadians working. Our government is doing that: 656,000 new jobs have been created since July 2009.

Our government is reaching out to help families right across the country, especially those in need. That is one of the reasons we introduced measures such as the universal child care benefit. As well, we have increased the national child benefit.

Every action that we take is to help Canadians and their families become independent and help them contribute to the economy and the community.

It is unfortunate that the NDP seems to want people to be dependent on government rather than independent from it. Sadly the NDP, as I have pointed out, has voted against every one of those initiatives that we have brought in to help the most vulnerable families.

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:29 p.m.)

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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, November 17, 2011

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer



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(Table of Contents appears at back of this issue.)

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, November 17, 2011

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

• (1005)

[English]

PRIVACY COMMISSIONER

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table the report of the Privacy Commissioner concerning the Privacy Act for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2011.

[Translation]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(h), this document is deemed permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE REPORTS

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of 95 departments and agencies, I have the honour to table, in both official language, the departmental performance reports for the 2010-11 fiscal year and their companion piece, entitled "Canada's Performance 2010-11".

[English]

I invite members to access the performance report at tbs-sct.gc.ca/dpr-rmr.

I also ask members to think about the benefits of using electronic reports versus the usual thousands of printed pages that have been distributed in previous years. Indeed, for the first time, the great majority of these DPRs are on memory sticks, thus saving the cost of printing three million pages. I have the honour of doing this for the first time in this Parliament.

[Translation]

VETERANS OMBUDSMAN

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table this morning, in both official

languages, the Veterans Ombudsman's report, entitled "One Veteran: A Matter of Fairness".

[English]

POOLED REGISTERED PENSION PLANS ACT

Hon. Peter Van Loan (for the Minister of Finance) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-25, An Act relating to pooled registered pension plans and making related amendments to other Acts.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

CORRECTIONS AND CONDITIONAL RELEASE ACT

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-350, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (accountability of offenders).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce an amendment to the Corrections and Conditional Release Act. The amendment would ensure that any monetary amount awarded to an offender, pursuant to legal action or proceeding, would be paid to victims and other designated beneficiaries.

The amendment would ensure victims of crimes came first and criminals would not profit from crimes.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

PETITIONS

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present two petitions this morning.

The first one is with regard to the atmospheric ozone layer, which is critical to life on Earth through its regulation of ultraviolet radiation from the sun.

Routine Proceedings

The ninth meeting of the parties to the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer is being held next week, in Bali. Canada's commitments to ozone monitoring and science under the convention and the government's commitment will no doubt be questioned.

The petitioners call upon the Minister of the Environment to develop a plan to ensure the integrity of the ozone monitoring program and commission a report to assess the adequacy of Canadian contributions to the global observing system for climate in support of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

• (1010)

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am also pleased to present a petition regarding chronic cerebrospinal venous insufficiency, or CCSVI.

Fifteen thousand procedures have now been performed in 60 countries. Patients report reduced brain fog and fatigue, and improved circulation and motor skills, as demonstrated through improved EDSS scores. Dr. Mehta studied 150 consecutive MS patients who showed more than a 25% increase in quality of life scores a year after the procedure.

The petitioners are calling for the Minister of Health to consult experts actively engaged in diagnosis and treatment of CCSVI to undertake phase III clinical trials on an urgent basis in multiple centres across Canada and to require follow-up care.

* * *

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if Questions Nos. 167, 170, 171 and 172 could be made orders for returns, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 167—**Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothé:**

With regard to Human Resources and Skills Development Canada funding in the riding of Pierre-Edouard—Dollard for the last five fiscal years: (a) what is the total amount of spending by (i) year, (ii) program; and (b) what is the amount of each spending item by (i) Technical Assistance and Foreign-Based Cooperative Activities (International Trade and Labour Program), (ii) Skills Link (Youth Employment Strategy), (iii) Consultation and Partnership-Building and Canadian-Based Cooperative Activities (International Trade and Labour Program), (iv) Canada Summer Jobs (Youth Employment Strategy), (v) Children and Families (Social Development Partnerships Program), (vi) Labour Market Development Agreements, (vii) Labour Market Agreements, (viii) Labour Market Agreements for Persons with Disabilities, (ix) Enabling Fund for Official Language Minority Communities, (x) Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities, (xi) Aboriginal Skills and Training Strategic Investment, (xii) Enabling Accessibility Fund, (xiii) Skills and Partnership Fund—Aboriginal, (xiv) Targeted Initiative for Older Workers, (xv) International Academic Mobility Initiative—Canada-European Union Program for Co-operation in Higher Education, Training and Youth, (xvi) International Academic Mobility Initiative—Program for North American Mobility in Higher Education, (xvii) Surplus Federal Real Property for Homelessness Initiative, (xviii) International Labour Institutions in which Canada Participates (International Trade and Labour Program), (xix) Labour Mobility, (xx) New Horizons for Seniors, (xxi) Career Focus (Youth Employment Strategy), (xxii) Fire Safety Organizations, (xxiii) Organizations that Write

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(Return tabled)

*Routine Proceedings***Question No. 170—Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:**

With regard to Human Resources and Skills Development Canada funding in the riding of Beauséjour for the last five fiscal years: (a) what is the total amount of spending by (i) year, (ii) program; and (b) what is the amount of each spending item by (i) Technical Assistance and Foreign-Based Cooperative Activities (International Trade and Labour Program), (ii) Skills Link (Youth Employment Strategy), (iii) Consultation and Partnership-Building and Canadian-Based Cooperative Activities (International Trade and Labour Program), (iv) Canada Summer Jobs (Youth Employment Strategy), (v) Children and Families (Social Development Partnerships Program), (vi) Labour Market Development Agreements, (vii) Labour Market Agreements, (viii) Labour Market Agreements for Persons with Disabilities, (ix) Enabling Fund for Official Language Minority Communities, (x) Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities, (xi) Aboriginal Skills and Training Strategic Investment, (xii) Enabling Accessibility Fund, (xiii) Skills and Partnership Fund—Aboriginal, (xiv) Targeted Initiative for Older Workers, (xv) International Academic Mobility Initiative—Canada-European Union Program for Co-operation in Higher Education, Training and Youth, (xvi) International Academic Mobility Initiative—Program for North American Mobility in Higher Education, (xvii) Surplus Federal Real Property for Homelessness Initiative, (xviii) International Labour Institutions in which Canada Participates (International Trade and Labour Program), (xix) Labour Mobility, (xx) New Horizons for Seniors, (xxi) Career Focus (Youth Employment Strategy), (xxii) Fire Safety Organizations, (xxiii) Organizations that Write Occupational Health and Safety Standards, (xxiv) Social Development Partnerships Program—Disability, (xxv) Foreign Credential Recognition Program Loans (pilot project), (xxvi) Fire Prevention Canada, (xxvii) Adult Learning, Literacy and Essential Skills Program, (xxviii) Canada-European Union Program for Co-operation in Higher Education, Training and Youth (International Academic Mobility Initiative), (xxix) Labour-Management Partnerships Program, (xxx) Social Development Partnerships Program—Children and Families, (xxxi) Social Development Partnerships Program—Disability, (xxxii) Foreign Credential Recognition Program, (xxxiii) International Trade and Labour Program—Technical Assistance and Foreign-Based Cooperative Activities, (xxxiv) International Trade and Labour Program—Consultation and Partnership-Building and Canadian-Based Cooperative Activities, (xxxv) International Trade and Labour Program—International Labour Institutions in which Canada Participates, (xxxvi) Sector Council Program, (xxxvii) Federal Public Sector Youth Internship Program (Youth Employment Strategy), (xxxviii) Aboriginal Skills and Employment Partnership Program, (xxxix) Employment Programs—Career Development Services Research, (xl) Career Development Services Research (Employment Programs), (xli) Occupational Health and Safety, (xlii) Youth Awareness, (xliii) Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy, (xliv) Homelessness Partnering Strategy, (xlv) Youth Employment Strategy—Skills Link, (xlvi) Youth Employment Strategy—Canada Summer Jobs, (xlvii) Youth Employment Strategy—Career Focus, (xlviii) Youth Employment Strategy—Federal Public Sector Youth Internship Program, (xlix) Apprenticeship Completion Grant, (l) Apprenticeship Incentive Grant, (li) Work-Sharing, (lii) Small Project Component (Enabling Accessibility Fund)?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 171—Mr. Andrew Cash:

With regard to Human Resources and Skills Development Canada funding in the riding of Davenport for the last five fiscal years: (a) what is the total amount of spending by (i) year, (ii) program; and (b) what is the amount of each spending item by (i) Aboriginal Skills and Employment Partnership (ASEP), (ii) Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy, (iii) Aboriginal Skills and Training Strategic Investment Fund, (iv) Adult Learning Literacy and Essential Skills Program, (v) Apprenticeship Completion Grant, (vi) Apprenticeship Incentive Grant, (vii) Career Development Services Research (Employment Programs), (viii) Canada—European Union Program for Cooperation in Higher Education, Training and Youth (International Academic Mobility Program), (ix) Canada Summer Jobs (Youth Employment Strategy Program), (x) Career Focus (Youth Employment Strategy Program), (xi) Children and Families (Social Development Partnerships Program), (xii) Contributions for Consultation and Partnership-Building and Canadian-Based Cooperative Activities (International Trade and Labour Program), (xiii) Disability Component (Social Development Partnerships Program), (xiv) Employment Programs—Career Development Services Research, (xv) Enabling Accessibility Fund, (xvi) Enabling Fund for Official Language Minority Communities, (xvii) Federal Public Service Youth Internship Program (Youth Employment Strategy Program), (xviii) Fire Prevention Grants, (xix) Fire Safety Organizations, (xx) Foreign Credential Recognition Program, (xxi) Homelessness Partnering Strategy, (xxii) International Academic Mobility—Canada—European Union Program for Cooperation in Higher Education, Training and Youth, (xxiii) International Academic

Mobility—North American Mobility in Higher Education, (xxiv) International Labour Institutions in which Canada Participates Grants (International Trade and Labour Program), (xxv) International Trade and Labour Program (ITLP) Contributions for Consultation and Partnership-Building and Canadian-Based Cooperative Activities, (xxvi) International Trade and Labour Program (ITLP) Grants for Technical Assistance and Foreign-Based Cooperative Activities, (xxvii) International Trade and Labour Program (ITLP) International Labour Institutions in which Canada Participates Grants, (xxviii) Labour-Management Partnership Program, (xxix) Labour Market Agreements, (xxx) Labour Market Agreements for Persons with Disabilities, (xxxi) Labour Market Development Agreements, (xxxii) Labour Mobility, (xxxiii) New Horizons for Seniors Program, (xxxiv) Occupational Health and Safety, (xxxv) Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities, (xxxvi) Organizations that Write Occupational Health and Safety Standards, (xxxvii) Sector Council Program, (xxxviii) Skills and Partnership Fund—Aboriginal, (xxxix) Skills Link (Youth Employment Strategy Program), (xl) Small Project Component (Enabling Accessibility Fund), (xli) Social Development Partnerships Program—Children and Families, (xlii) Social Development Partnerships Program—Disability Component, (xliii) Surplus Federal Real Property for Homelessness Initiative, (xliv) Targeted Initiative for Older Workers, (xlv) Technical Assistance and Foreign-Based Cooperative Activities Grants (International Trade and Labour Program), (xlv) Work-Sharing, (xlvii) Youth Awareness, (xlviii) Youth Employment Strategy—Canada Summer Jobs, (xlix) Youth Employment Strategy—Career Focus, (l) Youth Employment Strategy—Federal Public Service Youth Internship Program, (li) Youth Employment Strategy—Skills Link?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 172—Mr. Andrew Cash:

With regard to the Toronto Airport Rail Link: (a) what is the total volume of correspondence received by the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and by departments for which the minister is responsible calling for the electrification of the rail line from (i) individuals, (ii) organizations, (iii) elected officials; (b) what is the total number of petition signatures received by the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and by departments for which the minister is responsible calling for the electrification of the rail line; (c) what are the names and addresses of all organizations in (a); (d) since 2006, what reports has the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and the departments for which the minister is responsible produced or received regarding (i) the health impacts of diesel trains in urban centres, (ii) the benefits of electrification of the urban rail, (iii) the noise pollution of diesel trains; (e) what, if any, federal funding has been provided for the Toronto Airport Rail Link; (f) if federal funding was provided for the Toronto Airport Rail Link, were any conditions put in place requiring the electrification of the rail line; and (g) what is the government's position on making the electrification of urban rail lines a condition for receiving federal funding for transit projects contained within an urban area?

(Return tabled)

[English]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

*Business of Supply***GOVERNMENT ORDERS***[English]***BUSINESS OF SUPPLY**

OPPOSITION MOTION—ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.) moved:

That the House call on the Government of Canada to address on an urgent basis the needs of those First Nations communities whose members have no access to clean, running water in their homes; that action to address this disparity begin no later than spring 2012; and that the House further recognize that the absence of this basic requirement represents a continuing affront to our sense of justice and fairness as Canadians.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for St. Paul's.

It would be nice if we did not have to debate this issue, but we have to recognize that Canadians live, unfortunately, in very different conditions, depending on where they live. A continuing affront to our sense of wholeness, justice and fairness as Canadians is the fact that members of first nations communities and other aboriginal communities across the country are living in conditions of deep poverty and great hardship. The most telling reflection of this hardship is the fact that there are hundreds of communities which do not have access to clean running water at the present time.

I have a personal reflection on this because at the time that I led a government in Ontario, the provincial government made a decision that it was not going to tolerate this situation in our own province. Although it was, strictly speaking, outside our jurisdiction, we negotiated with the federal government a cost-sharing agreement in which Ontario, even though it did not have to, would contribute to infrastructure to ensure that people living in first nations communities would have access to clean running water, flush toilets, sewage treatment, and housing and the basic conditions of life which make a difference.

I spoke with Premier Selinger in Manitoba. He told me that he would be interested in negotiating a similar agreement with the federal government, but that the federal government was not expressing an interest in dealing with this question on an urgent basis. He signalled to me that his government was not going to do it without the support of the federal government, which is not an unreasonable position for him to take. However, if the federal government were willing, the Province of Manitoba would be willing to step up to the plate and contribute to making a difference to the first nations people who are living in northern Manitoba.

It really is quite extraordinary that the federal government has not taken up such an offer. It is not every day that a provincial government says it is prepared to spend money outside its jurisdiction in order to deal with a deep humanitarian problem. The federal government has said that it is prepared to change the regulations that would increase the requirements for first nations governments on the question of clean drinking water. However, that approach flies in the face of the recommendations the government has received from an expert panel that it appointed. That expert panel said to deal with the resources first and then the regulations.

• (1015)

[Translation]

The principle is very simple. We believe that all Canadians, regardless of where in Canada they live—whether it is in the north, the south or elsewhere in the country—have a fundamental right to have access to drinking water and that they also have the right to adequate water facilities. As Canadians, we refuse to accept that people live in such conditions of poverty, when we talk about Canada as a fair and just country. There is a contradiction there that the Liberal Party can no longer accept.

[English]

This is not a motion that is intended to engage us in partisan debate. I hope the government can find a way to support it.

The government may want to spend the day making partisan speeches saying that the Liberal government did not do this or that. We can all recognize that not everything was done that should have been done, but that is not the point.

The point is now we have clear public statements from the expert panel to which I have referred, chaired by Dr. Harry Swain who was a well-known deputy minister in the Government of Canada. We have the reports of the former auditor general, Sheila Fraser.

[Translation]

These reports from the Auditor General directly address the unacceptable living conditions in this country's first nations communities.

[English]

We have reports coming out as recently as this week indicating just how unacceptable it is for our country. As of 2010, 116 first nations reserve communities across Canada are under a drinking water advisory with a mean average duration of 343 days. Lack of access to clean drinking water presents a serious health threat to first nations reserve communities, creating a higher likelihood of disease and infection transmission, and poorer overall health outcomes.

We can look back to the 19th century and ask what explains the dramatic improvement in the living conditions of working people all across Europe, what accounted for a tremendous extension of life for working people in the middle of the 19th century. It was clean drinking water and sewage treatment. Those are the two things that made a profound difference to the health of ordinary people.

I can see many colleagues in the House, and all of us can speak of our travels. I remember one trip when I was in provincial politics in the 1980s to the communities recognized by my colleague from Timmins. It had an impact on me, and when I became premier I said that if we did nothing else, we had to take steps to make sure that we improved the basic living conditions and the infrastructure for the people living in Attawapiskat and Kashechewan and the communities on the shores of James Bay in the province of Ontario.

Business of Supply

There is not a single member in this House who would not be equally affected by visiting the northern reserves right across this country. Members would find isolated conditions, people living in poverty, housing conditions that are unacceptable by any standard. Too many people are falling sick because they do not have access to something quite basic and fundamental, safe, clean drinking water.

Let us think about Canada, the country of clean water, the country of beautiful lakes, the country of flowing rivers. Is this a country that cannot provide the basics of life to its own people? Is this a country that says it will pass regulations but it will not provide the resources?

It is something we cannot accept, and we insist that it be changed.

• (1020)

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Madam Speaker, I understand the umbrage that comes forward from the leader of the third party. I understand the substance of the motion. We will support this motion. It is a good motion from the standpoint that we all are in agreement that the current standards are unacceptable. The situation in first nation communities across the country in too many cases is unacceptable.

However, I do have a real issue with the attitude that is displayed. When I was sitting here in opposition for 13 years, in year 12, the government of the day sent the army into Kashechewan because it had not dealt with the fact that the community outfall was above the water intake. That is the kind of behaviour and lip service we saw from the Liberal administration, which I find unacceptable.

Hon. Bob Rae: Madam Speaker, you may be surprised and so may the minister by my response to that. I think we all recognize that more could and should have been done. I do not come into the House with this motion with any sense of partisan superiority. There is not a government in this country that can look at itself and ask if it has done everything possible to deal with this situation.

We all know the circumstances that have existed in the past. What we are asking the House to do is to say that these are conditions that cannot be allowed to continue. If it makes the Conservatives feel better all day to simply say that the Liberals did not do anything over a period of time, they can go ahead. We have a defence to that. We can show members what we have done. I pointed to an area where the Liberal government of the day and the New Democratic government in Ontario were able to agree on an infrastructure program in northern Ontario that actually made a difference, that actually fixed some problems.

I encourage the minister to take the same practical approach as we go forward.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to hear that our communities of Kashechewan and Attawapiskat are being referred to because they are the epicentres of Canada's shame on the international stage for what is happening. As we speak, there is a state of emergency in Attawapiskat. There are families who are dumping waste out of buckets in the streets. That is happening under the current government. It happened in Kashechewan under the last government.

As premier of Ontario, he talked about the province getting involved. After Walkerton, we saw the province establish standards that affected water standards right down to cottages and to campgrounds, but those water standards end at the reserves. These are citizens of Ontario. People have seen the federal government's years of neglect. The member has spoken with the premier of Manitoba. Would he speak with Premier Dalton McGuinty and say that if the federal government will not protect the citizens of Ontario, that the province will step in and ensure that the guarantee of clean drinking water, fire standards and education will be maintained because these are citizens who are being denied their basic rights?

Hon. Bob Rae: Madam Speaker, I have no hesitation in answering positively to that suggestion. I am prepared to talk to anyone on this question. Every government must be involved in trying to find a solution. We can all point fingers but the fact is that it is a clear federal responsibility to deal with conditions on reserve. I can only tell the hon. member what I did when I was in a position to do something about it. I know that is what the Liberal Party did when we had a chance to do something about it.

Instead of pointing fingers, we need to ask ourselves how we can continue as one country. How can we look ourselves in the mirror and say that we are one country when there are people living in conditions that would be completely unacceptable to anyone who is a member of this House? Any member of the House visiting a community like that would wonder how this has been allowed to go on. It will cost money. It will take resources. It will require training. It takes a change and we think it is time for that change to happen right here. It is time to do it.

• (1025)

[Translation]

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my leader for his passionate speech, for his leadership and for giving us the opportunity to discuss this issue that is very important to all Canadians.

[English]

My friend, the member for Mount Royal, used the phrase “the mobilization of shame”, and that is really what today's debate is about. When Canadians see those posters in the washrooms about washing their hands, we hope they think about those people who do not even have running water to wash their hands. I feel embarrassed as a Canadian. What I have found throughout my riding of St. Paul's and across this country is that all Canadians are increasingly embarrassed about the third world conditions in which so many of our first peoples live.

It is important to recall what happened two years ago during H1N1. It is no coincidence that the communities, which ended up on the list of no running water, were the very communities devastated by the impact of H1N1. People in Canada came to know the names of St. Theresa Point, Garden Hill, Red Sucker Lake and Wasagamack because those were the communities with air transport taking out their citizens and too many of them not returning.

Business of Supply

In Lessons Learned, we saw that, in the first wave, significant pressure was put on air ambulances when 76 patients required air transfer from their northern communities. In 383 hospitalizations, 71 patients were admitted to intensive care and there were 11 deaths due to H1N1 flu in those northern Manitoba communities, even though, in the report on H1N1, first nations communities in Manitoba and northern Ontario being hit by a highly communicable H1N1 virus. Despite being just 10% of the population in Manitoba, natives made up one-third of the 685 swine flu cases in that province. As our leader said, about 1,000 homes in northern Manitoba still have no running water and many of these homes have no plumbing of any kind.

During that time, we went to visit some of these communities. I think all Canadians need to, in some way, be with us on that journey, to walk into a home and see, where there ought to be a kitchen sink, a turquoise bowl filled with the water from last night's dishes because there is no place to put that grey water. People need to wait until the next water delivery comes. Or, walk into the outhouse that these people have to use all winter long. It is just inexcusable in a country as rich as Canada. I do not think there is one Canadian who thinks this should continue and that this is not an urgent problem.

When our government fell in 2005, we had just received the report of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development. As others have said today, I, too, was in cabinet during the embarrassment and tragedy of Kashechewan. We know we need to do more but, unfortunately, that was six years ago.

Since then, we have had the report by the expert panel on safe drinking water for first nations and the safe drinking water for first nations Senate report, chaired by the Hon. Gerry St. Germain, a Conservative senator, in which the conclusion reached states:

Legislation to regulate water standards on reserve is required. No one, including this Committee, argues differently. Regulations are, however, only part of the answer. Sustained investment in the capacity of First Nations community water systems and of those running the systems is absolutely essential to ensure First Nations people on-reserve enjoy safe drinking water. Without this investment, we risk introducing a regulatory regime that burdens communities and does little to help them meet legislated standards.

Unfortunately, the government has come forward with only an interest in legislation and no commitment for the resources to actually meet the standards that would be put forth in those regulations.

Then, in 2008, we had the devastating status report of the Auditor General of Canada in the House of Commons in Chapter 4—Programs for First Nations on Reserves.

• (1030)

We then had the national assessment on first nations' water and waste water systems which, members will be appalled to learn, was available in April 2011 but was hidden by the government until after the election. I think the Conservatives knew that all Canadians would have been appalled.

We then have the recent Waterproof 3, Canada's drinking water report card, in which the province of Ontario gets an A and the federal government gets an F. As my colleague from Timmins—James Bay has said, this is because the kind of report carding for provinces stops at the border of the reserve.

It says in that report that clean water is not just an environmental issue, that it is a health issue and a human rights issue. While the federal government now acknowledges the human right to water, it has not taken any steps to make that a reality for the people who live in this country.

This time last year, the Government of Canada signed the declaration for indigenous people wherein there is a responsibility on housing, sanitation, health and social security, and yet it has done nothing.

In September, we wrote to the minister and asked him to do something and explained that we would not be able to support any legislation that did not come with the resources that were necessary.

I believe that we, having written today's motion, need to amend it. In talking with first nations and the opposition, I now wish to move, seconded by the member for Lac-Saint-Louis:

That the motion be amended by replacing the words "no later than the spring of 2012" with the word "forthwith".

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty to inform the members that an amendment to an opposition motion may be moved only with the consent of the sponsor of the motion. Therefore, I ask the hon. member for Toronto Centre if he consents to this amendment being moved?

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Yes, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The amendment is in order. Questions and comments for Timmins—James Bay.

• (1035)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to say at the outset how pleased I am that the Liberal Party has amended its motion. We, in the New Democratic Party, have been pushing the issue of clean drinking water for many years and the need to recognize that this is an immediate crisis, not just something that can be put off, even for days.

At the present time, there is a state of emergency in the community of Attawapiskat. I visited with a doctor from the Weeneebayko health authority last week who said that these children and elders were now at immediate risk of life in the community from the lack of sanitation. Children have open sores on their bodies from being exposed to toilet waste that is being dumped in ditches.

I would like to ask the member what she thinks about a situation where a government has money for all manner of priorities except for first nations children. We see it in education and in housing. We see again and again the sense that there are two classes of people in this country and that one class of first nations children are continually considered nonentities. What does that say about our country? What does that say about the Parliament of Canada at this time?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Madam Speaker, I am saddened that the Minister of Health has never visited any of these communities. The Arctic is a very different place from the places on reserve. During the H1N1 crisis there were no visits.

We need leadership from the federal government. This affects many government departments. The Minister of Aboriginal Affairs cannot do this on his own. The First Nations Inuit Health Branch also needs to provide some leadership. It is a tragedy. I urge the Minister of Health to visit these communities, particularly Attawapiskat, to see first-hand the action that must be taken by the government.

[Translation]

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): Madam Speaker, the honourable leader of the third party in this House spoke a great deal about the federal government's responsibility in this regard. The hon. member just spoke about Kashechewan—I hope that I pronounced that correctly. According to our research, the water quality was so bad there at the time that residents had to be evacuated. The Liberals' first reaction was to argue with the provincial government about whose responsibility this was. It is therefore a bit surprising to see their reaction today.

In the hon. member's opinion, how is the position of our friends in the third party different now with regard to the federal government's responsibility? Should they have taken action at the time rather than arguing with the province?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Madam Speaker, I hope that this question is not a history lesson. It is a priority for the future. When our government was in office, the situation in Kashechewan was not very pretty. The Kashechewan First Nation must move communities to one location near a river and train its people on how to manage drinking water systems. I hope that, today, all the members of this House agree that the situation is urgent and that action must be taken immediately.

[English]

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am a little astounded with some of the things that have been said here. Since we became government, we have put in place all of the things that needed to be addressed in a comprehensive way in order to make real progress in terms of advancing to the point where first nations will have the same water standards and quality as other Canadians have.

I am acutely aware of one thing. We were operating from a 2001 national assessment done under the previous administration. A lot of our discussion has revolved around the Island Lakes region in Manitoba and the fact that many homes in that area do not have piped water and sewers. Very conveniently, the 2001 national assessment done under the previous government only looked at communities with piped water and sewers. We chose to do a complete and comprehensive survey, the Neegan Burnside study. I released the results of that survey this year.

Government does not enter into an exercise like that unless it is prepared to deal with criticism. Obviously, the more comprehensive the survey is, the more problems that are going to be identified.

Since 2006, we have invested \$2.5 billion on first nations water and waste water systems. Every year we have invested more than the previous government by quite a long shot, yet we keep hearing that somehow we are not prepared to make the investment but we want the regulations. I find that to be very hypocritical.

Business of Supply

I would like to talk about the first nations infrastructure investment plan. This is something we develop annually in partnership with first nations. We have ongoing A-base funding of roughly \$1 billion a year under the capital facilities and maintenance program. We are earmarking the largest percentage, approximately 45%, of that asset area for water and sewer.

In addition, we are working with communities that have been mentioned both by my colleague from Timmins—James Bay and my colleague from St. Paul's. We are doing a lot more in these communities than we are being given credit for. As a matter of fact, we are going to be making real progress in the short term on those. For that reason, I have no difficulty with the amendment that has been put forward by the member for St. Paul's because we are on it.

• (1040)

I agree that residents of first nations communities should have access to safe, clean and reliable drinking water. I have significant experience in my professional history prior to becoming a member of Parliament on which to base that belief.

Our government has devoted much time, energy, and taxpayer dollars to addressing the issue. We inherited a backlog of high risk water systems from the previous government. We addressed those high risk systems that were identified by the 2001 assessment, which we now know from the national assessment we commissioned and reported on this year was woefully lacking. We have more issues out there than what we originally believed.

When we formed government, we collaborated with the Assembly of First Nations to begin to implement a plan of action on first nations drinking water. While considerable progress has been made, as I have described, much work does remain to be done.

There are complex factors that contribute to the problem. It is absolutely unacceptable that first nations communities are not protected by the same standards of drinking water as other Canadians are. As minister, I have been clear and consistent on this point. The national chief has been clear on this point as well. He described the situation before the Senate standing committee looking into the issue this way:

When children and their families are not able to trust the drinking water, there is no safety or security.

I agree wholeheartedly with that statement.

Most Canadians trust the quality of their drinking water. The foundation for this trust is a regulatory framework, clearly defined responsibilities and protocols enshrined in law. The legal framework applying to municipalities, provinces and territories, along with public health agencies and utilities, prescribes specific roles, but no such legal framework exists for the vast majority of first nations communities.

There was reference to various reports by various bodies. A Senate standing committee in 2007 concluded with the simple statement that legislation to regulate water standards on reserve is required.

Business of Supply

Every independent group that has studied the matter in any depth has reached a similar conclusion. The framework currently in place is clearly inadequate. The two major components of the current policy framework are protocols for safe drinking water on reserves and guidelines for Canadian drinking water quality. These documents are undoubtedly valuable, but they have no legal basis. The policy is not legally binding and it does not support full accountability.

The Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development completed a study of first nations drinking water. The study looked at the joint initiative launched in 2003 by Health Canada and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. According to the report, the 2003 initiative suffered from an inherent flaw: the absence of clear performance indicators and accountability mechanisms. Part 5 of the commissioner's report reads in part, "It's not clear who is ultimately accountable for the safety of drinking water".

Further on, the report states:

[U]ntil a regulatory regime comparable with that in provinces is in place, INAC and Health Canada cannot ensure that First Nations people living on reserves have continuing access to safe drinking water.

The commissioner made five recommendations: create a federal regulatory regime for drinking water on reserve; clarify design codes and standards; ensure monitoring and follow-up; create institutions for capacity building; and provide progress reports to Parliament.

● (1045)

We are continuing to take action on each of these recommendations. Clearly we must set the bar higher for water and waste water systems in first nations communities. Without clear standards and assigned responsibilities, we cannot hope to succeed. That is why we introduced legislation on this subject in the last Parliament and why we will introduce similar legislation in this Parliament. We have worked diligently for over a year with first nations partners on developing acceptable legislation, and we have made a commitment that we will continue to work in a collaborative way in the regulatory process flowing from the legislation.

The proposed legislation aims to make use of the expertise of provincial and territorial regimes. The regulations would be enabled by a new federal law on safe drinking water for first nations. The legislation would leverage existing regimes, along with the considerable expertise and experience of provincial and territorial officials, to establish appropriate regulations adapted to the needs of first nations communities in each region.

The legislation would bring us a giant step closer to our larger goal: that residents of first nations enjoy the same protections afforded other Canadians when it comes to safe, clean and reliable drinking water, and the effective treatment of waste water.

I will return to the conclusion of the report by the Senate committee that looked into this:

Regulations are, however, only part of the answer. Sustained investment in the capacity of First Nations community water systems and of those running the systems is absolutely essential to ensure First Nations people on-reserve enjoy safe drinking water.

We can have the best infrastructure in the world, but if we do not have the appropriate certified and trained operators to run the system, we are at great risk of something going wrong. Therefore,

we are making major investments in operator training and certification as well as infrastructure. Those are the two prime areas.

We are working with first nations, and provincial and territorial officials because they have first-hand experience. They know what works and what does not. They know how to make water and waste water treatment facilities work. This is what we need to do to craft an effective regulatory regime.

I mentioned earlier that between 2006 and 2012, the Government of Canada will have invested approximately \$2.5 billion in first nations water and waste water infrastructure and capacity. Some 130 major projects were completed in the four fiscal years ending March 2010. These projects included expansions to existing water and waste water systems; construction of new systems, storage facilities and pumping stations; expansion of distribution and collection networks; and development of subdivision lots with water and sewer servicing. However, until an adequate legal framework is in place to support them, there is significant risk to these projects.

The national assessment was a very time-consuming exercise, because we have 633 communities across the country. Many of them are small and dispersed, with multiple water and sewer distribution systems, including individual wells and septic systems. Nearly 60% of the communities have 500 or fewer residents.

● (1050)

That is why we must have regular and frequent sampling and testing of water to ensure public safety. We need the legislative framework and accountability networks to be in place. Otherwise, we have no assurance that the treatment and distribution system can ensure safe, clean and reliable drinking water.

● (1055)

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, there is no question that a better regulatory regime is an important objective. As I said in my earlier comments, this is not about trying to score one point against another.

I want to ask the minister about the conversation I had with Premier Selinger just a few days ago. He indicated, and it was not something the premier was telling me privately but something he said in the legislature, that the Province of Manitoba was prepared to sign the same kind of joint agreement as was signed between Ontario and the federal government to deal with the infrastructure needs of the communities that do not have access to running water now.

I wonder if the minister could tell us if the Government of Canada is prepared to contemplate entering into such an agreement.

Hon. John Duncan: Madam Speaker, I have had multiple discussions with the minister of aboriginal affairs in Manitoba. Our government did sign a comprehensive agreement on flooding and flood proofing. We all know of the very tragic stories emanating from Manitoba because of flooding this year, and the federal response has been very good on that.

In my discussions with the aboriginal affairs minister on the Island Lakes region, the homes that were built with no capacity for accepting running water and toilet facilities were an issue. We have agreed to collaborate through HRSDC programming and some provincial input to make some changes there. We are also looking at some other progress that we think we can make very early, perhaps starting this year, in upgrading some of those same homes.

I do not know the details of what the agreement was between Ontario and the federal government, but without knowing the details I can say that we are very willing to collaborate and co-operate with the Province of Manitoba. I am very optimistic. There was also involvement with the Mennonite community. Both the federal and provincial authorities were embracing that thought process and that organization as well.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I listened with great interest to my hon. colleague when he talked about 2005 when the army was sent into Kashechewan. I was there during that evacuation and we would all agree that it was one of the low points for Canada in terms of our failing the first nations communities.

I have worked with the minister on the issue of getting fire services into Kashechewan. We have worked on the Attawapiskat school situation. I have talked to him about the ongoing crisis in Attawapiskat. I appreciate that there is a working team in place and right now the plan is to dedicate \$500,000 to try to remediate badly condemned homes. If a house is abandoned in Attawapiskat, it is pretty much beyond the pale of anything one would imagine anywhere else.

I am concerned about the immediate risk in Attawapiskat, the lack of services and inability to deal with the fact that people are facing health risks due to the dumping of toilet waste because they have no running water. I would ask the minister if, as part of the Attawapiskat working group, he would bring in a health team and direct his bureaucrats to work with the community to address the immediate risk that is facing these families.

I am very concerned about the risk of fire in a trailer. There are 90 people living in one trailer. If there is a fire this winter, it will be tragedy befalling all of us. I am asking the minister if he will work with us to ensure that we have a broader strategy to alleviate this so that we do not have another Kashechewan.

● (1100)

Hon. John Duncan: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Timmins—James Bay for the question. It seems like we do have lots of conversations.

The member's request seems most reasonable. I will talk to my colleagues and my officials about having Health Canada input into the working group that is trying to address the current issues in Attawapiskat. That was the question and I think this answer will be satisfactory to the member.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu (Pickering—Scarborough East, CPC): Madam Speaker, being a professional engineer, I am aware of the importance of clean water for people and the environment.

Business of Supply

I would like to ask the hon. minister how legislation would help protect Canada's substantial investments in first nations water and waste water systems?

Hon. John Duncan: Madam Speaker, whenever we have assets that we have constructed, if they are not properly maintained, we do not get normal longevity from them.

We have houses that were constructed in first nations communities in 2006 that are now boarded up and uninhabitable. While this is not an example of water and waste water, the latter systems also require continual, ongoing monitoring and maintenance.

This is why the operator training program is so important. Much of our investment since 2006 has been in hard investment, the infrastructure investment. We need to ensure that we have protected that investment by having standards, plus the trained people to look after it. In that way we can continue to afford to make ongoing investments. Otherwise, this becomes a quagmire or quicksand, and we will never get to where we need to be.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Madam Speaker, it seems that we all agree that it is urgent that this matter be resolved and that it is also urgent that sustainable solutions be found immediately.

I would like to ask the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development if he is going to champion this cause among his health, finance and infrastructure colleagues in order to ensure that appropriate and sustainable solutions are found for aboriginal communities. I would like to know what he plans to do so that he and the colleagues that I just mentioned take immediate action.

[English]

Hon. John Duncan: Madam Speaker, of course I am the lead minister on this, and of course the government has made major commitments and investments and continues to do so.

We do have a plan that we are re-doing on an annual basis, as I mentioned in my speech. We do not do this in a vacuum, but we do it along with our first nations partners. That is ongoing.

The nice thing about now having the comprehensive national assessment is that we know where to set our focus and our priorities in terms of our investments. Technology is moving very quickly and is making things more affordable, not less affordable. That is good news, as well.

● (1105)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am very proud to rise today to represent the people of Timmins—James Bay. Unfortunately, the wonderful region of James Bay in Ontario is the epicentre of so much of the tragedy that we have been talking about this morning. It is of course all across Canada, but our communities seem to be pointed out.

Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my hon. colleague from Manicouagan.

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Right now, as we speak, there is state of emergency in the community of Attawapiskat. It is not the first state of emergency, it is the third state of emergency in the space of three years. I was there last Monday with the Weeneebayko Area Health Authority meeting with families living in tents. In one tent we met a family of six who have lived in a tent with two double beds and a couch for two years. It was pretty cool and the snow had not started. The mother said that when one daughter gets upset, she says she is going to her room. Her room is the couch.

One would have to see this situation to believe it. In another case, we were in an unheated shack that had two grandparents and a little girl sharing a bucket. The bucket was their toilet. They had to dump it in the street in front of their neighbours. On that corner there were 15 people dumping buckets in ditches. This is in Canada in 2011. If we did not see it first-hand, we not believe that this situation exists.

There are 90 people living in a trailer with six washrooms and hardly any fire exits. If a fire were to break out in that trailer over the winter, it would be a catastrophe. There is no sprinkler system. There are no fire alarms. This is the sense of urgency in Attawapiskat right now. These states of emergency do not just happen, crises do not just appear. As we have seen in Kashechewan in 2005, we had three full evacuations of one community in one year, first from E. coli and then because of the flooding. It happens because of a number of factors: chronic underfunding and poor planning.

The Minister of Aboriginal Affairs talked about houses built in 2005. They are uninhabitable. I was in Fort Albany just two years ago, where a brand new subdivision had children sick from the mould covering the walls. The houses were built on the cheap, not for the flood plains of James Bay. How can we put good money after bad? How could we have such poor planning in place that we build stuff on the cheap? The water crisis in Kashechewan was a direct result of the fact that the water plant was not built up to standards.

Beyond the poor planning and the chronic underfunding is the regulatory lapse that allows for two sets of standards, one that protects the rights of citizens across this country and then another standard that almost does not even exist for first nations people.

Let us talk about fire protection. On the James Bay coast in the far north, for police services, they did not bother to put sprinkler systems in the fire units because it costs money. That would be illegal anywhere else in the province of Ontario or Canada.

We were in the Kashechewan jail cell which looked like a makeshift crack house. The provincial minister of security went to see this place with us, but nothing was done. Two men, Jamie Goodwin and Ricardo Wesley, burned to death in that jail cell. They were screaming to get out. The police were burning their hands to get them out. They could not. There were no fire suppressions or sprinkler systems. That would be illegal anywhere else, but in first nations communities that lack of regulatory framework happens all the time.

We need to address the chronic underfunding. I am glad to hear the present Indian affairs minister talk about the need to start investing. Two years ago, in Attawapiskat, we had a sewage backup and 90 people were left homeless. The response at the time from the then Indian affairs minister was, "Tell them to just stay in their

houses". They had dirt and waste coming from their basements, and they were told to sit in their houses and wait. Those houses were not fixed. The damage started the ball rolling for the present crisis in Attawapiskat. Anywhere else in Canada there would be a response, but this is not what has been happening.

We see communities like Kashechewan and Attawapiskat reaching the breaking point. In terms of this regulatory double standard, there is a new film out called *Canada: Apartheid Nation* that is about the situation in Attawapiskat. I do not use that word lightly because the *Toronto Star* used the word "apartheid" to describe the situation for children in Attawapiskat who had been denied basic education rights that are the right of any other child in this country.

There is discrimination against first nations children in these communities. Children are going to school coming from overcrowded homes. In Attawapiskat there are 25 to 26 people in a two bedroom house. People sleep in shifts. The children go to school on a toxic wasteland in a makeshift portable. No wonder kids start dropping out in grade five.

• (1110)

Shannen Koostachin, who is from our region, talked about children who give up hope and lose hope in themselves in grades 4 and 5, and kill themselves. There is no support for those children when they are in crisis. Just this past month a youngster killed himself in southern Ontario. It was a tragedy. The nation said we have to do something.

In Moose Factory, two winters ago, 13 children killed themselves and 80 other children attempted to kill themselves. It is a town of 2,000 people. Imagine what would happen if 93 children were taken out of any community of 2,000 people to be marked for death. There would be an international outrage. What was the response? While the community was running around trying to save kids from killing themselves, the province cut the Payukotayno child welfare services because it was costing too much money.

This is the double standard that is happening. Therefore, we need to invest. I will support the government with respect to the building of water infrastructure, which has never happened before.

However, we have to address the fact that the basic rights of these community members are being denied. We do not have the proper building standards on the reserves that we have provincially. We do not have the same education standards on reserves that we have provincially. There is a chronic double standard. We do not have the same fire standards on reserves that we have in the communities.

In Kashechewan I went to the funeral of Trianna Martin, the four-year-old girl who died in a house fire. There were 27 people in that house. There was not even a fire truck to get to that little girl. This is the kind of thing that happens.

As a country Canadians have a hard time believing it because we pride ourselves on our willingness to care. However, right now I have a state of emergency. I have people living in tents in one of my communities down the road from the richest diamond mine in North America. They are dumping their waste in buckets saying that they cannot go on like that any more. The doctors are saying that children will die, that something will happen. This is the extent of the crisis.

It is not just in Attawapiskat, Port Alberni, Kashechewan or Moose Factory; it is in community after community across Indian territory. It will only change when we decide to make it a priority. The greatest resource we have in the north is not the oil sands, the diamond mines or the copper mines, it is the children who come from these reserves.

If members met some of the children in communities like Attawapiskat, it would break their hearts because they have given up hope. Some young people have the power to change the world. However, if we do not give them the homes or the education and health supports that they deserve, we are wasting the greatest possible resource this country has. It is a black mark on Canada right now internationally. It has to end. It has to change.

We can talk all we want about investments and regulatory frameworks. This is not a partisan issue. It is part of the broken promise that goes all the way back to the breach with Champlain to be on a path together with our first nations communities. We will continue on that path.

In many ways over the last 10 years I have seen how that path has moved forward, but in 20 years, 30 years or 50 years, we will still be on that path. It is incumbent upon us now to fix what was done. The damage done by the residential schools should not be continuing today with children being denied basic education services. What happened in Kashechewan in 2005 should never happen again in any other community in this country.

We are on a path together. We have to get beyond the partisan fight. We have to make this a priority in this Parliament, at this time, for our children and with respect to our obligations for the future of the country.

•(1115)

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay for his passion and leadership on this issue.

This is not a criticism of the member's speech; it is a comment. I would like the member to reply with a brief comment as well.

What is missing in this discussion so far is the issue of self-government. We have to change the nature of the relationship.

Here we are debating the conditions of a sewage treatment plant or the lack of running water in a community thousands of miles away because it does not have the resources to deal with these problems. Until we create a Canada wherein we actually transfer the resources to allow people to make these decisions to get on with it themselves, we will continue this pattern of frustration and dependence, which is such a negative aspect of this whole issue we are discussing today.

We all need to figure out a way to move forward on the self-government agenda. We nearly got there at one time in our

constitutional history. However, we did not get there and, as a result, we see a huge backup in land claims, discussions and negotiations. There is great difficulty getting there.

I would ask the hon. member to comment on that.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, in response to my hon. colleague, the issue of self-government is essential and it is the one other element that needs to be addressed.

When I said that I have seen elements going forward, I had the great honour to work with the Algonquin Nation in Abitibi and La Verendrye Park in northern Ontario.

Ten years ago there were blockades stopping projects. Now there are impact benefit agreements. The problem is, we need to go further. We need to get beyond the limitations of the Indian Act.

When I talk to people in Attawapiskat, they tell me how they have been handcuffed for the last 100 years by the Indian Act. Some 150 years ago it was the Hudson Bay factor and then it was the Indian agent, but now it is the INAC bureaucrats. They are all the same guy, and they all have their finger holding down these communities.

We have to re-establish a broader political relationship and we will see change, but in order to do that, we need to ensure resources and we need to ensure that there are education opportunities, that there are training opportunities, and that they have the resources to become fully able to handle the communities because they know what the issues are and they know the solutions.

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member, who spoke with such passion. I am very familiar with his passion and empathy for the aboriginal communities in his riding. However, I think that he speaks for all aboriginal communities and even for all the forgotten people in our very prosperous country.

I would like him to provide more details because he addressed a number of issues. It is not just a matter of infrastructure; there are many other areas affected. I would therefore like him to speak more about the importance of having a strategy that truly helps these communities in a sustainable way.

[English]

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, there are many broader issues that will be spoken to over the day. We need to inspire and we need to be inspired by the young people. They are the future.

I tell the story again and again of Shannen Koostachin and the young people of Attawapiskat. What they have done, from putting a face to the forgotten faces of first nations children, has changed the debate in this country forever. They are not just heroes of first nations communities, they are heroes to kids across this country.

The older people in the House probably do not realize how much change is happening on the ground, but if they go into a public school anywhere in this country and ask about what the kids on the James Bay coast have done on education rights, any kid will be able to tell them that story.

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It is happening with the young people. We have to have heroes; we have to have role models. I have seen children in communities who start to give up hope because they do not think they can make a difference. That is how much we have internalized the damage, but there is real positive change happening.

We have great leaders. We need to work with them and give them the tools they need, and again, education, education, education. Every child needs the right, as Shannen said, to go to a safe and comfy school because when they have that educational opportunity, we will see northern Canada transformed in a way that it could never have been transformed otherwise.

• (1120)

[Translation]

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain (Manicouagan, NDP): Madam Speaker, considering the ethnological concepts that will be addressed in this speech, it is important to provide some context in which to frame the intellectual exercise about to take place.

Having spent the past few months in this House and at a number of different meetings of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, today I can offer some underlying reasons for the almost total lack of aboriginal popular support for Canada's political dynamic.

The first nations' historical passiveness toward the democratic process, as observed in this House, reflects a desire to distance themselves from the utilitarian relationship that has gradually developed between the aboriginal communities and the Canadian government. When I talk about a utilitarian relationship, of course I am talking about it in a purely pernicious sense since, too often, aboriginal identity issues are used for advancing some sort of political platform.

It seems that too often the socio-cultural issues of the first nations are brought to the public's attention only if there are political gains to be made by the various parties sitting in this House.

This perception stems from certain aboriginal apprehensions associated with the fraudulent manoeuvres of supposedly bygone days and is fuelled mainly by a strong sense of powerlessness against a system that is removed from the social realities of contemporary tribal communities.

I am deliberately putting the emphasis on the concept of "community" since my argument focuses mainly on the living conditions of Indians living on reserves. I differentiate between Indians living on and off reserve because during the last committee meeting, a representative of the commission on aboriginal peoples indicated that there was a certain inequity, there were certain noticeable differences between the living conditions of Indians living in urban centres off reserves and those living on reserve. I am emphasizing that difference today.

For six months now, I have been doing my best to introduce my colleagues to a culturally relevant vision of the Indian issues that enter into our debates and parliamentary work. This has led me to comment on certain statements made by my colleagues on issues such as access to housing and essential services for remote reserves in Canada.

I am bringing this up today in connection with the comment made by the hon. member who spoke before me. At the beginning of the week he sent me a press release on the situation as experienced by members of the Attawapiskat community.

He began by saying that aboriginals living in that community are now reduced to living in camps. In response, I jokingly said—jokes are a typical Innu way of changing the subject and defusing the tension—that aboriginal communities have been living in camps for 30,000 years. There is nothing new under the sun. But what is distressing is that this is not a choice for these communities; they are being forced into it out of necessity. I feel that this is a sorry state of affairs in 2011 since access to basic services should go hand in hand with the notion of being a Canadian citizen.

It is sometimes wise to boil ideas down to their most basic concept. This is one tactic, one characteristic of my nation—we always try to return to traditional reasoning when faced with a difficult situation. Often, we find solutions to uncomfortable situations in the community.

This vision, which is part of the community I come from, is extremely useful when looking at possible solutions to the daily problems faced by the Innu nation. It is one of the reasons that we ask questions of elders, who take on the task of applying a traditional vision when it comes to contentious issues and issues of identity. And when I say contentious, I mean situations that pit certain community members against one another.

• (1125)

In the past, we used a consensus process; it was a type of community justice. If there were disputes between people in the community, this process resolved many issues in the end. There was an adversarial aspect: people would openly state the problem and a solution would often be found through collaboration.

That said, even those with ancestral knowledge, the elders, within my home community fully realize that they cannot completely dismiss modern socio-economic realities when looking at the living conditions of band members. That is why I must agree with the argument presented by my colleagues who say that access the basic commodities, such as running water, potable water in fact, is one of the intrinsic rights of a Canadian citizen.

The simple fact that nearly 2,000 aboriginal households in Canada do not have access to running water illustrates the urgency of the situation. This alone is enough to justify a unified effort by all levels of government in order to address this matter of national interest. Needless to say, it is the federal government's duty to preserve human dignity in this country. In that regard and under international law, drinking water is recognized as essential and a prerequisite to exercising human rights. Without drinking water, exercising human rights would be rather difficult, since, after two or three days, there would no longer be any humans.

With that in mind, in my speech I plan to highlight certain industry practices that specifically affect the integrity of water resources in Canada's isolated communities. Exploration and mining activities north of the 50th parallel present a significant risk in terms of contamination of groundwater, which is vital to isolated communities that have only limited recourses when it comes to access to drinking water. I am addressing the issue from the perspective of the 50th parallel because it is relevant to my culture and my background. Many resource exploration initiatives are taking place at this time, either near or north of the 50th parallel. History shows that these lands are inhabited mainly by remote aboriginal communities that are cut off from the rest of the world.

I emphasize this little-known aspect—the harmful impact of industrial practices on the living conditions in aboriginal communities—because many instances of damage and deterioration in first nations' water resources have been brought to my attention in the context of my job. In fact, I plan to go to Kitigan Zibi over the weekend—along with one of my colleagues whom this concerns directly, since the community is in his riding—in order to address some concerns raised by residents there. I will be able to shed some light on the situation and update the House when I return.

My brief experience in this Parliament leads me to believe that the current political and economic climate favours the indiscriminate extraction of mineral resources in remote regions. This suits the unfortunate plans of an all-powerful industry that cares nothing for the concept of corporate social responsibility because each social unit north of the 50th parallel is so isolated. With this speech I am giving notice that I will be keeping an eye on industry practices in traditional first nations territories. Damage to the water resources in isolated communities is just one of the adverse effects of putting economic interests first in this country.

I assure the House that I will use all means at my disposal to ensure that social and environmental considerations will temper the initiatives put forward by a government which, through wilful blindness fueled by purely mercantile considerations, is contributing to the ruin and perdition of the nation.

● (1130)

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Madam Speaker, I truly appreciate the concrete examples provided by my colleague. He always gives speeches that reflect his community. He said that governments do not acknowledge the importance of working with the Assembly of First Nations. In 2010, the Prime Minister abstained from the vote that would recognize the right to water and sanitation of the Assembly of First Nations. We are talking more about water quality. In addition to harming the health of first nations, the Conservative government's decisions also harm the environment. Environment Canada's budget was drastically cut this year, which will lead to less monitoring of drinking water quality, not to mention the impact of industrial infrastructure. How does my colleague feel about that?

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question. If the considerations and concerns raised by the AFNQL—I was talking about Quebec and Labrador—are not taken into consideration by the government, know that I am all ears, as are others in the NDP. During our last meeting with that assembly, we talked about the integrity of resources and groundwater. These

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topics were also discussed directly with Chief Picard. The other chiefs who belong to this assembly also shared their concerns. This problem is being studied right now, especially with respect to the effect of radon gas and its presence in groundwater.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Madam Speaker, in 2004, under the former Liberal government, we had the Kelowna accord, which had the agreement of different levels of government and aboriginal communities. If the current government had respected the Kelowna accord, the communities would be benefiting from it now. Would they not be in a better position than they are now? I would like to know what the member thinks about that.

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. The accord he is referring to was not brought to my attention. Members will understand that I am new to the House.

There is certainly some complacency on the other side of the House since this situation has yet to be fixed, even though it is nothing new. The quality of water in isolated communities has been in the news for years, and I have yet to see any measures introduced to resolve this problem. The industry still has a strong presence in isolated regions and contributes nothing, with its drilling, to improving these communities and even less so to improving the quality of the water, basins and groundwater.

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would first like to congratulate my colleague from Manicouagan on his absolutely incredible presentation, which shed a lot of light on the whole issue. I would simply like to ask him if he can suggest any solutions to any of the issues he raised in his speech.

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her question. These issues are part of everyday life in Washat, whenever I go back. Since it is a 15-hour drive from Ottawa, I cannot return as often as I would like. Problems regarding water resources are still affecting communities near Sept-Îles because of uranium exploration. The same is true on the Lower North Shore. In my region, problems are often related to mining exploration. Personally, I think these issues need to be debated further over the next few years, since the situation is not really improving and I have not seen any proactive measures to fix the situation.

● (1135)

[English]

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to enter the debate on the opposition day motion on water in first nations communities.

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We have identified this as an issue whose time has come to be solved. This morning the leader of the Liberal Party of Canada spoke very clearly about the fact that there has been inadequate attention paid to this issue by all parties over the years. We can argue who has done good things and who has not done good things. His plea was that we put partisanship aside and we recognize together that there is no reason for not solving the problem. The problem is the inequity in terms of access to safe, clean drinking water and waste water treatment in first nations communities compared with non-aboriginal communities. I could not agree more.

This is an issue that all members of Parliament care about. It is a humanitarian issue. It is an equity issue. It is about safety. It is about saving lives. It just takes political will. This motion invites members of Parliament to agree that the time to solve this problem is now.

All levels of government share a responsibility for ensuring that all Canadians have reliable access to clean, safe drinking water.

[Translation]

We need to establish a strategy immediately in order to ensure that all aboriginal communities have access to drinking water. We need to take pertinent and decisive action to resolve this completely unacceptable situation.

[English]

There are fundamental water problems in Canada. Water is a very complex issue. The delivery of safe and clean drinking water is extremely complex. I learned that in my first year as minister of the environment in British Columbia. There were far too many boil water advisories in British Columbia. As the environment minister, I worked with the health minister to look at our approach to drinking water. A panel of experts headed by up by Mr. David Marshall, who was the chair of the Fraser Basin Council, assessed a proposed new drinking water act. It provided feedback to the government. That act was duly passed. There was also a safe drinking water action plan.

That action plan addressed the cumulative impacts on water. It gave communities the power to bring industry, the municipal government, non-governmental organizations and government departments together to develop a plan for addressing the cumulative impacts on water. The regulations gave the government some teeth for making sure that the challenges to obtaining safe and clean water were addressed. Having gone through that process, I am aware of the great complexities that plague us in having safe drinking water in communities across our geographically vast nation.

The regulatory and legislative gaps are still rife, despite the fact that many provinces and the federal government have made efforts to address that issue. Federal-provincial jurisdiction is always a challenge. The federal government wants to ensure it is not stepping into a provincial jurisdiction and provincial governments may be waiting for the federal government to take leadership.

Provinces and the federal government work together often in a constructive way. The leader of the Liberal Party pointed out that when he was premier, the government of Ontario worked with the Liberal government in Ottawa to address issues of inequitable access to safe water and infrastructure in aboriginal communities. The federal-provincial sharing of jurisdiction, of which water is a classic example, does not need to mean inaction or ineffectiveness. It simply

needs to be addressed in the development of the strategy. It means working with the provinces to solve this problem.

By the way, I would not consider that to be a great strength of the current Conservative government. Consultation with the provinces in matters such as its crime bill, Bill C-10, and other matters has been missing completely and consultation certainly is necessary in a water strategy such as the Liberals are proposing in this motion.

There is a deficit across Canada in all categories of infrastructure. Municipalities, small and large alike, have gone to the federal government to reinforce that it is the federal government that has the ability to tax. A large percentage of taxes that are levied are federal government taxes, but the majority of infrastructure is the responsibility of municipalities. There is a mismatch.

There is over \$1 billion in new funding needed immediately, and \$4.7 billion over the next 10 years to upgrade water and waste water infrastructure to existing standards, according to a national report regarding first nations reserves. It would take \$4.7 billion over 10 years to address this problem. Those are significant resources especially at a time when Canada is facing a slowdown in its economy, and we have not yet made up the half a million full-time net jobs that we have lost since before the recession.

● (1140)

Let us put this into perspective. What is the cost to the treasury as a result of the reduction in taxes for large and profitable corporations? Their tax rate will go down from 16.5% to 15.5%.

I was at a breakfast this morning with the eminent economist Jack Mintz from Alberta. When asked about corporate tax rates, he said that his view is that they are appropriate right now. They are far lower than those in the United States. He is not calling for additional tax reductions.

The Conservative government is planning a corporate tax reduction from 16.5% to 15.5%. That will cost the treasury well over the \$4.7 billion over 10 years that is needed for first nations waste water and drinking water infrastructure.

Rather than further reduce corporate taxes, the government could decide that it would be more important to ensure that first nations living in communities without running water have safe drinking water and waste disposal. Imagine that. Is the government able to rethink its ideological decisions and do what is right to provide justice and equality for our first nations people? I hope so.

What about the government's new approach to crime? It will mean harsher and longer sentences for young people. Criminologists and people working in our criminal justice system say that will be counterproductive.

Many aspects of Bill C-10 are widely criticized by criminologists and public safety professionals. Many Canadians are concerned about the increased criminalization of Canadians and the effect that would have on first nations. The reality is there is a disproportionate number of first nations people in our jails, and it will be even worse when Bill C-10 passes.

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We have been arguing that those funds should be put into supports to prevent young aboriginal people in our cities from ending up in prison, as opposed to bringing in longer prison sentences, more prison sentences, and inflexible sentencing.

There are nine former bills rolled into that one bill. The Parliamentary Budget Officer has estimated that the government's crime agenda will cost \$5 billion. Let us take that \$5 billion and use it to upgrade the water infrastructure in remote first nations communities, those communities where people are carrying their water in buckets. Let us solve that problem rather than throwing more aboriginal young people in jail. I would ask the Conservative members to think about that.

Does it make more sense to add more prisoners to our already overcrowded prisons? Because of overcrowding, 85% of prisoners cannot access the drug treatment programs or anger management programs they are required to do under the conditions of their corrections plan. The government added \$120 million over five years for security, for dog teams, ion scanners and security experts. Why? Because overcrowding leads to more criminal behaviour in prison. The government wants to further overcrowd the prisons and dump more money into prison security, and yet it is cutting the drug treatment program in prisons. This is only going to get worse and become more expensive.

We should use the funds that Canada will have to dedicate because of Bill C-10 and the overcrowded prisons to address the lack of access to running water in our first nations communities.

● (1145)

As of last year, 116 first nations reserve communities across Canada were under a drinking water advisory. On average, these drinking water advisories last a year. They cannot drink water for that period of time. What are they going to do? They are going to spend time boiling that water, using expensive diesel fuel or other fuel that in some cases has been flown into their communities, so they and their children do not get sick.

That is completely unacceptable. Too many of these communities have living conditions that are shocking to Canadians when travelling to other countries and seeing some of the communities without running water and waste disposal. We should be shocked into action, knowing that those communities are rampant in Canada.

There are a number of things that have led to this problem. The government's response so far has been to cut Environment Canada's environmental monitoring program. We need to add resources. The answer is not regulation without resources. These communities do not have resources.

I want to just touch on some of the myths about water in Canada. I recently hosted a policy breakfast in Vancouver Quadra with a very eminent, recognized professor at UBC, Dr. Karen Bakker. She is the author of a book about water called, *Eau Canada*, which has been very highly regarded and has won awards.

Dr. Bakker came to my policy breakfast to talk about five myths of Canada's water. One of them is that we have the most abundant fresh water anywhere. That is not true. There are countries that have more fresh water, and certainly on a volume of water per square hectare, we are not near the top of the pack.

The myth is that our fresh water is clean. In fact, we lag in terms of the cleanliness of our water. Unfortunately we know that some of our industrial developments are contaminating our water. With some of our farming practices, even in the Fraser Valley, in today's era of understanding the threats to groundwater of overusing fertilizer or mismanaging the disposal of sewage from livestock, we still see the contamination of our streams, creeks and aquifers. Canada's water is not as clean as Canadians would like to think.

We also think our waste water is being treated before it goes back into the environment, as it should be. According to Dr. Bakker, Canada has nothing to be proud of in terms of our waste water treatment standards.

There is a myth that our water is well-regulated and unfortunately that is also untrue. When I was the minister of environment in British Columbia, I discovered that British Columbia was called the wild west for groundwater because there was absolutely zero regulation of that water. Anyone could put a well of any size anywhere and extract water from the ground without any regulatory oversight or rules. One of the things I was able to do as a provincial minister was to introduce the first-ever groundwater regulations in British Columbia.

Last, according to Dr. Bakker, people's conception about threats to our water is the export of bulk water to the United States. That is one of the biggest threat. In fact, Dr. Bakker's view is that this is a low risk because the northern U.S. states would prevent it. Their water regulatory regimes are stronger than in Canada. The risk is that Canadians do not understand the depth and extent of the problems with our water supplies.

I want to get back to the situation of first nations bearing the brunt of the challenges of having clean running water and waste water treatment. There is a lack of drinking water and a lack of adequate sanitation and flush toilets.

● (1150)

First nations communities are 90% more likely to lack running water than other Canadian and non-first nation homes. Just think about that. That is simply unacceptable and we cannot allow it. Canada is a country that has a medium rate of income inequality, but it is growing faster than income inequality in the United States. This kind of neglect of first nations' basic health, safety and access to clean water contributes to income inequality. Families are spending their time, effort and resources to do something that I, in Vancouver Quadra, can do by turning on a tap or flushing the toilet. Those families are not spending that time completing high school, or getting post-secondary education or finding a way to have jobs and economic opportunities in their communities.

Business of Supply

We do see dramatic differentials in our human and social conditions in first nations communities. The levels of lower economic opportunities, such as health, education, longevity, infant and child mortality, numbers of community members in jail, et cetera, are unfortunately higher in first nations communities. First nations make up 2.7% of the adult population, yet 18.5% of the prison population and that is unacceptable. However, it does not come out of the blue. It ties into our inability or unwillingness as governments to put our shoulders to the wheel and work together to tackle this very basic determinant of the quality of life, which is to have safe running water and waste water treatment.

We need a real strategy, not just a list of problems and goals. We need to have the actions, the accountability for those actions and we need to take care of this problem and we need to start now.

• (1155)

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is hard for me to believe we are talking about Canada and about children who are using a bucket as a washroom. We are talking about sewage going out into open ditches. We are talking about those who do not have clean drinking water. We are talking about Canada where the gap between the rich and the poor is getting wider. I see that in my own community.

I want to focus today on the aboriginal students and young people. I am absolutely amazed that there is even a need for this debate, that the government is not rushing out saying that it has not known this was happening and that it is going to go out and fix this right now. The government did that for banks. It fixed the problems of banks and oil companies by giving them huge tax breaks and money.

What are some concrete steps the government could take straight away to ensure that no child in Canada lives in these kinds of conditions?

Ms. Joyce Murray: Madam Speaker, the government could take the \$5 billion over 10 years that is required to get the job done and dedicate those funds to do that. It could work with first nations and the provinces to map out the action to do that.

I would add on the fact that first nations children are in this situation, the federal government is responsible for that in many cases. For example, the Tsay Keh Dene in North Interior British Columbia in the Rocky Mountain Trench are a people who used to have 7.5 million hectares that they occupied in their hunting and fishing lifestyle. When government came in to build a dam in that area, it flooded the rich bottom land and the community was moved by the then Department of Indian and Northern Affairs to a 13-hectare swamp land site on the side of Finlay Road, which was a logging road in the area at 72 miles. They were told that this was their new home. They were given stacks of three quarter inch plywood and 2x4s and told that they could build their houses. They had no infrastructure for sewage and water. They had plywood shacks with no insulation. That was the new community for the Tsay Keh Dene thanks to INAC. That is the kind of thing the federal government—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I must give an opportunity for other members to ask questions.

The hon. member for Wetaskiwin.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened intently to the member for Vancouver Quadra. She has made numerous references to the publication, *Eau Canada*, specifically to a piece authored by Dr. Bakker, who was clear that Canada needed to strengthen governance of water in Canada.

Does the member support legal standards for drinking water for first nations that other Canadians enjoy?

• (1200)

Ms. Joyce Murray: Madam Speaker, of course I support standards for drinking water, but that is only the beginning.

A federal government years ago moved first nations out of their traditional territory and put them into small reserves that were totally unsuitable. It disrupted the ecologies of the game and fish that were the basis of their livelihoods. The government has a far greater responsibility than to just say that there will be some standards.

To go back to the people of the Tsay Keh Dene, after a few years of trying to live in these uninsulated shacks with no services, having to drive down the road to get buckets of water out of the creek, they just moved out and went back into the forest to try to live in their historic way again. It was completely untenable to live in the reserve.

How many of our first nations are in that very same situation because the representatives of the people of Canada took those kinds of actions and dismissed and denied their rights?

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Madam Speaker, I listened very intently to the hon. member. However, this is not just an issue for aboriginal people in Canada, although it is a crisis in their communities, it is also a pan-Canadian issue and an environmental issue, which will not get the attention it needs if the government continues to cut Environment Canada, putting water inspection at risk.

We understand that the frontbench of the Conservative government did the same thing when it was the frontbench of the Harris government in the province of Ontario. It cut water inspection there and that led to the tragedy of Walkerton, which is known to this day. We will look very closely at whether the government will take the issue of water seriously.

Her party was in government for 12 years. Why did it not address this issue? How can the House really believe that the Liberal Party will be serious about this issue now when it certainly was not on its agenda when it was in government and could have actually done something about it.

Business of Supply

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, the Liberal leader very wisely called for this to be a debate about how to move forward on a critical issue. If the member wants to talk about the past, I could ask why the leader of his party was the one responsible for bringing down a Liberal government that had actually consulted with first nations and consulted with the provinces over the course of a year and a half and come up with the Kelowna accord to address this very issue? It was his leader and his party that undermined that accord and they should take responsibility for that.

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, everyone agrees that the issue of access to drinking water, social housing and the infrastructure to support all of that is a priority for Canada. However, several conditions created by the Liberals continue to undermine access to drinking water, as well as the health and dignity of first nations communities. For instance, the Liberals put a cap on federal spending for aboriginal communities, limiting it to a 2% annual increase. As we know, both inflation and aboriginal population growth are higher than 2%. The fact is, the 2% cap translates into declining investments.

Will my Liberal colleague and her party now support eliminating the cap that they themselves established when they were in power?

[English]

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, I know it is not reasonable to expect that the member would have read the Liberal Party platform but that was explicitly in the Liberal Party's platform.

Many things need to be done in Canada by governments but we need to focus here on the specifics of the drinking water and waste water infrastructure that is needed. That is what this motion asks the government to do and the other parties to support. I understand that there are many associated issues.

One of the NDP members talked about environmental issues. I have a whole set of thoughts about how we contributed to the drinking water problems by doing resource developments without proper consultation and planning, and we continue to do that. For example, we are seeing a northern gateway pipeline proposal where first nations are saying that they were not consulted on it. Consultation is important. Preventing water related problems from resource development is critical. Replenishing our forests where they are being devastated by global warming related infestations, like pine beetle, is critical for hydrology.

There are many things we can do on the environmental level and on the social level, as the member just pointed out, with education, but we need to put the money for this infrastructure on the table, consult, get some action, get some timelines and get this done.

• (1205)

Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have no hesitation in adding my voice in support of my hon. colleague's motion to improve water facilities in first nations communities. I thank him for demonstrating his party's willingness to work with all parliamentarians to advance an issue that has been a priority for members of this side of the House since first forming government in 2006.

I can assure the opposition that the Conservative government shares this commitment to ensuring that all first nations residents will have access to safe, clean and reliable drinking water. We recognize that access to safe water, the efficient treatment of waste water and the production of sources of drinking water on first nations land is critical to ensure the health and safety of first nations people.

This has been repeatedly demonstrated through our repeated investments and in partnership with first nations communities all across this country. Our government has made access to safe drinking water and effective waste water treatment on reserves a national priority.

Between 2006 and 2013, our government will have invested approximately \$2.5 billion in water and waste water infrastructure in first nations communities. These funds have been put to work under Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada's capital facilities and maintenance program, as well as the first nations water and waste water action plan and Canada's economic action plan.

These investments have steadily increased the effectiveness of water services for first nations people and, of course, for first nations communities. In making these investments to address water challenges on reserves, our government has also made it a priority to work in partnership with first nations people to ensure they fully benefit from these investments and their voice is heard.

I will use the example of the Moose Deer Point First Nation in Ontario. Our government invested \$18 million toward the community's new water treatment plant. That water treatment system featured an intake and a wet well that also includes a slow sand-filtered treatment. This system enabled water production that meets the guidelines of Canadian drinking water quality.

Thanks to investments by the Moose Deer Point First Nation, the Government of Ontario and our government, local residents now have a new recreation and health centre. By investing in the health and wellness of first nations communities, we are also helping to stimulate the local economy and open up opportunities for community members to enjoy fitness activities close to their own homes.

Our government has invested in 17 capital infrastructure projects throughout the Atlantic region to achieve both social and economic progress. While these funds are primarily targeted at water and waste water infrastructure, they are also helping to fund road construction and road maintenance, plus emergency management, such as the purchase of new fire trucks, which also depend on a reliable supply of water.

All of these investments in community infrastructure for first nations are helping to stimulate economic growth, foster sustainable first nations communities and support stronger, safer and healthier communities.

Business of Supply

The Sheshatshiu Innu First Nation in Newfoundland and Labrador is receiving over \$7 million to facilitate upgrades to its waste water collection and for the design and construction of new mechanical sewage treatment plants. This investment has enabled the community to improve its waste water disposal, while creating over 1,600 hours of employment.

On the opposite side of the country, the White River First Nation in Yukon Territory is benefiting from design changes in two treatment plant systems to help temper water correctly, as well as new on-line chlorine analyzers. These improvements are empowering first nations groups to provide clean, safe water to all people in their communities.

The Iskut First Nation in British Columbia has taken advantage of our government's \$1.4 million investment to enhance the drinking water system in that community by constructing ultraviolet and chlorine disinfection systems as well.

• (1210)

Then there is the example of the Dene Tha' First Nation in Alberta, which opened its Chateau Water Treatment Plant earlier this year. The new plant is equipped with membrane filtration, the latest in water filtration technology. This new technology goes beyond the conventional plant filtration and delivers quality that surpasses the requirement of current standards.

Construction was completed on a new raw water reservoir and the water intake pipe was also replaced on this reserve. Repairs were also completed on the existing water plant, the fire pump and water main to optimize the existing plants.

The Government of Canada contributed \$11.8 million to this initiative from the \$1.4 billion investment for aboriginal peoples under Canada's economic action plan. However, it was the work and the planning at the community level that really made this project happen. The community leaders and residents of the Dene Tha' recognized that in addition to ensuring safe, clean drinking water, infrastructure projects like this bring forth other benefits. They provide opportunities for skills development and meaningful jobs. They help to spur economic growth, laying the foundation for long-term prosperity.

The Black Lake and Fond du Lac communities of the Denesuline First Nation in Saskatchewan also reaped the benefits of our government's \$18 million investment in two new sewage systems.

Likewise, the Piapot Cree First Nation has benefited from partnerships with the federal government. Our \$4.2 million investment in the community has resulted in the expansion of its water treatment plant, including the building of a new well, increased building and reservoir size, and the development of new treatment equipment that carries out reverse osmosis.

In Manitoba, the water and sewer project at Fisher River First Nation has been completed, generating positive results for local residents. It consists of a new water treatment plant, a new lagoon, water distribution and sewage collection piping, as well as multiple trucks. Again, the benefits extend beyond immediate improvements to public health to include economic development opportunities for the people of the Fisher River First Nation.

Another inspiring example of the power of partnerships is the water treatment plant at Kahnawake in Quebec. The community's water treatment plant is truly an outstanding facility that meets the needs of this community's growing population.

I could cite further examples all across the country. The stories I have outlined underscore the power of partnerships and what we can achieve when we work together toward common goals. Partnerships also acknowledge that responsibility for providing water and waste water services to first nations is shared among band councils and the federal government.

Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada provides funding and advice regarding the design, construction, operation and maintenance of water and waste water facilities. It also sets standards through protocols and provides funding for training staff, such as water treatment plant operators. However, the hands-on, day-to-day business of water and waste water management rests with the communities. That is why we must work together.

Our long-term goal is to do more than just improve water quality. We also want to increase the capacity of first nations communities to manage and operate water and waste water services, plus, develop skills to design and construct facilities in accordance with established standards.

Through initiatives such as the circuit rider training program, which other speakers have highlighted, the number of first nations operators who are certified or in training toward certification has steadily increased.

The extension of the first nation water and waste water action plan continues to support water and waste water treatment facility construction and renovation, as well as the operation and maintenance of these facilities, the training of operators, and related public service activities on reserve.

In budget 2010, the Conservative government recognized the need to continue to support first nations communities in the provision of safe water treatment. We allocated an additional \$330 million to extend the first nation water and waste water action plan for two more years.

That funding is in addition to the annual departmental allocation of approximately \$200 million and the \$187.7 million over 2009-11 under Canada's economic action plan.

• (1215)

Of course, there are challenges that remain. These challenges will require the concerted and co-operative effort of all parliamentarians. This was reinforced by the national assessment of water and waste water systems in first nation communities. As the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development acknowledged at the time of its release, more needs to be done, especially in capacity building and monitoring.

Business of Supply

I would point out that this is the first time that a national assessment of this scope has ever been commissioned by a federal government. It is a reflection of our commitment to transparency and accountability. The national assessment is an unprecedented reference tool that will support our work going forward. We have developed a response plan to address the findings and recommendations of that report.

The response plan is built on current programs and initiatives to improve on-reserve drinking water. We will implement this plan in partnership with the first nations communities. Our government will continue to work with first nations by investing in infrastructure, monitoring and capacity. Work is currently under way to address 15 high risk water systems this year. On infrastructure alone, our government plans to invest in an additional 57 water systems by fiscal year 2015, a very ambitious but doable project. In addition, we will continue to invest in capacity building, which the report highlighted is a major challenge in maintaining effective water and waste water systems.

We also recognize that legislation is required to ensure that first nations have the same protection regarding safe water as other Canadians already have. With the introduction of Bill S-11, we were already well on our way to achieving that goal prior to the last election. As a result of the dissolution of Parliament on March 26, 2011, the proposed safe drinking water for first nations act died at committee on second reading in the Senate. That was certainly not our wish.

I can assure members that this was only a temporary setback. The Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development and his officials have been engaged in a dialogue on safe drinking water with first nations. With the benefit of that input, the minister will reintroduce legislation to ensure that first nations have access to safe, clean and reliable drinking water. The opposition has no reason to doubt that the Conservative government will continue to make safe drinking water and effective waste water treatment on reserves a national priority, from coast to coast to coast.

I urge all members of Parliament to work with the Government of Canada to accelerate the progress we have already made on this very important file.

• (1220)

[Translation]

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have seen where their priorities lie. Perhaps there was one bill that did not pass because of the election, but the government began by focusing on omnibus bills, such as the one on crime, for example, instead of presenting concrete measures to fix aboriginal issues.

I have a specific question. This morning, I heard that the government supported the Liberal motion. Will the government still support it, even with the amendment? And will the government commit to taking tangible action and putting its heart and soul into fixing the problem, and not just for the photo ops or for scoring political points at the expense of aboriginal peoples?

[English]

Mr. Ray Boughen: Mr. Speaker, is only fair to say that there are many responsibilities, many requests, many issues to deal with in government. Certainly, ensuring there is safe water for aboriginal folks is a top priority of this government.

We would be wrong to suggest that no other issues are before Parliament; there are many issues. Today we are looking at the safe water issue, and we are working very hard to ensure that safe water is a way of life on all reserves from coast to coast to coast.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if there is one thing to take from the intent of today's motion and debate, it is where we go from here. One not uncommon question in infrastructure investment once something is built is how it continues to provide for the community going forward in terms of operations and maintenance. If we look at Kashechewan, the infrastructure existed. While we can debate whether it was the right plant in the right place, one thing that the report said was truly lacking was training for the operators of that plant.

Does my colleague think that even before any government makes a commitment to bricks and mortar and to working toward the development of infrastructure, there has to be a training component and human resource development so that these issues and problems can be addressed with local answers and initiatives?

Mr. Ray Boughen: Mr. Speaker, we have looked at that issue very carefully. In presenting the bill to the House, we wanted to make sure we covered as many options and bases as possible. In the discussion here, we are suggesting that the work on clean water will provide many opportunities for skill developments. We are looking at having first nations people manning their own operations, being trained how to handle water and waste water to make it safe. The development will result in many meaningful jobs and help to spur the economy, because it will offer employment to people who may not be employed at the time the training happens. There will be economic growth helping to lay a foundation for long-term prosperity of the many first nations people who will be working on water treatment.

Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I understand that the Assemblée des Premières nations du Québec et du Labrador passed a resolution to explore regulatory development and that it in fact reconfirmed the resolution in September of this year. The Atlantic Policy Congress passed a similar resolution.

Could the member for Palliser enlighten the House as to whether other first nations have been consulted in the development of this legislation in the way those two bodies have?

• (1225)

Mr. Ray Boughen: Mr. Speaker, in answer to the question, I will share this with the House. Since 2006, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada and Health Canada have engaged with first nations and first nations organizations at the provincial and territorial level to develop a framework that will allow all first nations people access to water treatment systems and to make sure that the project moves forward.

Business of Supply

When the bill was crafted, this issue was taken into consideration and it has been addressed.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the hon. member opposite for this marvellous display of actions, measures and programs to help aboriginals and first nations. However, the 2011 Auditor General's report states that there are still many gaps and that they are related to communication and the transfer of power, authority and freedom that would allow first nations to take action in their own communities. In the end, despite all the steps that have been taken in the past, we have not seen any progress in terms of children's health and the safety of waste water management infrastructure.

How can we believe that the government will really take action to make drinking water accessible to families, women and children so that first nations can operate freely in terms of federal programs?

[English]

Mr. Ray Boughen: Mr. Speaker, as we said earlier in the presentation to the House, government cannot solve all ills of society in one move and, certainly, we acknowledge that much has to be done in this Parliament to help the first nations and that we have to work together to ensure safe drinking water and the disposal of waste water.

What happened prior to the introduction of this bill is water under the bridge, if members will pardon the pun. We certainly cannot go back and fix that. What we will do is move forward and deal with the issues that are current today and tomorrow.

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in addition to thanking my colleague for all of the information he has provided, I would like to ask how the government is working with partners to improve water quality across first nations.

Mr. Ray Boughen: Mr. Speaker, the government is well aware that the only course of action that really works well is partnerships. When we have strong partnerships, things happen.

We are looking at increased access by first nations to water systems, and first nations folks are talking about the work that will eventually move to 375 operators, all of whom will be trained people.

That is part of the answer to ensuring there are partnerships and like-thinking and designs that will carry things forward. Indeed, waste water projects will affect 36,000 people in a positive manner.

That will all be part and parcel of the bill when it is tabled here in the House.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, being a member of Parliament from Manitoba and having had the experience of being in the Manitoba Legislature for a number of years, there are few issues that really touch a person as much as the fundamentals of being able to live.

There is a certain expectation, I believe, that Canadians have as a whole in terms of normal living standards. Year after year would go by and we continue to have this outstanding issue on the quality of water for thousands of Manitobans.

I believe, at the end of the day, that there is no political party in this Chamber that can escape the issue of blame for not doing enough. All political parties have to take some responsibility. When we talk about the children in northern Manitoba and the importance in terms of getting them that healthy commodity of water, we have had administrations of all political stripes attempt a solution. Ultimately, in some ways, there has been some success, but it has been very limited success.

There has been a great deal of frustration because there is a sense that governments are not doing enough to provide what is an absolutely essential service, which is to have access to water. Imagine people living in a northern rural community where they have to exit their homes and go to a lake or a river with a pail to scoop up some water to be brought home, so that they can get rid of waste or have it to boil Kraft dinner, for use in doing dishes, or having that drink, or having it available to mix with kool-aid packages, or whatever it might be.

A vast majority of Canadians have very little understanding and, I would argue, very little appreciation of the degree to which individuals who do not have that simple access to whatever have to go through. In other words we can sympathize. There is no doubt that we can sympathize with what is happening. However, can we really empathize with what is happening in these rural communities, not only in Manitoba but throughout our country?

My focus, of course, for now is on the province of Manitoba. About a year ago, the *Winnipeg Free Press*, which is one of Manitoba's most read papers, did a fairly decent story on the issue. I believe it was on the reserve at Red Sucker Lake and that area. It drew a lot of attention to the issue.

The reason why I raise that is because I believe we all have somewhat of a role and responsibility to educate. Through that education, I believe the more people who are aware of the situation, the greater the need will be to try to get this issue resolved.

I have had the opportunity in many different forums to enter into discussions about the quality of life in rural Manitoba, particularly up north, and with issues dealing with food. I introduced a private member's bill back in the Manitoba Legislature suggesting that we need to have one price for milk because of how important milk is to the children up north. There was a feeling that we needed to make it affordable because quite often pop could be bought for less than milk. There is a very low consumption of milk products, nowhere near the degree to which people in northern communities could or should be drinking milk. Price does matter.

● (1230)

We need to get into these types of discussions with our constituents because most people believe that every home in Canada has access to running water. If they want water, they just go to the tap, turn it on and drink it.

Most people would be quite surprised to find out that there are 100-plus communities in this country that do not have the ability to turn on the water at the kitchen sink and use it at their discretion. That is why I appreciate media outlets like the *Winnipeg Free Press* highlighting the seriousness of the issue.

Business of Supply

This begs the question: What should be happening? It is not like this is a new issue. This issue has been around for years. As I indicated at the beginning of my comments, all political parties have dropped the ball to a certain degree.

With the motion today, we are trying to raise the ante. We are saying that the Government of Canada needs to recognize that it is now time for the government to act, even though many would argue that the government should have acted yesterday. This opposition day provides a wonderful forum for the government to clearly state on the record that it will put in some timelines, that it will make a commitment as to how it will approach this issue.

The leader of the Liberal Party referenced his visit to a rural community in Ontario where he saw first-hand the impact of no water coming out of a tap. Being so touched by that, he went back to the Ontario Legislature in Toronto and said something had to be done. He took the initiative to work with the federal government in order to make a difference for the communities he represented as premier of the province of Ontario.

I, if not all members in this chamber, would recognize this action as someone recognizing just how serious the issue was. The Constitution and treaty agreements clearly illustrate that it is not an issue involving provincial jurisdiction, yet he felt something had to be done. In working with the federal government, he was able to at least address a part of the issue.

I understand that the member for Toronto Centre did get a chance to meet with Premier Selinger, who has been the Premier of Manitoba for a couple of years. He is very familiar with the northern caucus, which is made up of all New Democratic MLAs.

Manitoba has put this issue on the table. From what we understand, the Government of Manitoba recognizes the problem and it wants to ensure that rural communities, reserves and others do have clean running water as all Canadians expect.

The province of Manitoba is prepared to work with Ottawa. We know the leadership within aboriginal communities is strong. There is no shortage of individuals within our first nations who do not feel passionate about this issue because, in good part, they live it. They are constantly dealing with this particular issue. I would suggest that they are the major stakeholders in this. Some consultation is needed to work in co-operation with our aboriginal leaders. We have to broaden it out a bit more to look at the stakeholders.

• (1235)

The time has come for the federal government, through this motion, to play a stronger role. We have argued this for the last number of years as a political entity in the House. At the end of the day, we need the federal government to recognize the leadership role that it has to play in resolving this issue because, in good part, resources matter. If the resources are not there in order to allow this clean flowing water into our rural communities, it will not happen.

If the Government of Canada decides not to play that leadership role, there is a good chance the conditions in many of these communities will not improve. That is why we would ultimately look to the government in Manitoba's case. I have not canvassed all of the provinces that would be impacted. I suspect most provinces would have concerns within their own areas. I am sure all provinces

share the same concern with respect to the availability of clean drinking water. However, from Manitoba's perspective, the major stakeholders are at the table. At the very least, they now want to see leadership coming from the House.

This opposition day does allow the opportunity for us as legislators to raise what we believe are important issues for our nation. Our first opposition day dealt with suicide. As a whole, people were quite relieved to see the discussion that had taken place. I would suggest this is one of those issues that a great majority of Canadians would see as the right thing to be talking about today.

However, to talk about it is one thing; to act on it is another. It is the government of the day that ultimately has to take action as we in the opposition will hold it to account. If in fact the government takes action by coming to the table and demonstrating leadership that will make a difference, I will be one of the first to applaud.

Again, in my province I know that it is doable. It is doable because the will is there in the minds of all the stakeholders. The only one we need to gauge to see where it is at is the federal government. Hopefully, in the next number of weeks we will have a better indication in terms of its commitment to provide the resources and leadership necessary in order to make a difference.

It is multi-faceted in the sense that it is not just about building a water treatment facility. I realize that hundreds of millions of dollars is required in order to resolve the problem because it is not just treatment facilities we are talking about. In many ways it has to do with holding tanks or the infrastructure in some of the homes themselves. There is a serious infrastructure deficit in the delivery of water.

• (1240)

If we want to resolve this issue, the only way to do it is for the federal government must come to the table. There are times we could ultimately argue that government needs to cut back on expenditures, but for this issue, there is no excuse for us not to take some form of action.

The attorney general back in 2005 made a series of recommendations for first nations drinking water. That was not the only time, but it was a significant time in the sense that a detailed report came out with a series of recommendations on types of things we needed to do. It was a good indication that we had dropped the ball, or we were not addressing the issue up to that point and we needed to take some action. However, since that period, not much has taken place.

As of 2010, 116 first nations reserves and communities across Canada were under drinking water advisories, with a mean average duration of almost a year, or 343 days. That is thousands of people and a lot of communities. The lack of clean drinking water presents serious health threats. We hear a great deal about that.

I have had the opportunity to meet with individuals from first nations. I get the opportunity more than one might think because quite often a number of people from the reserves will come to live in the beautiful riding of Winnipeg North for a part of the year. This is when I am quite often told about the conditions they have to endure. That is one of the reasons why I feel it is really an important issue for us to deal with.

Business of Supply

As this point tries to emphasize, it is very much a health issue. Clean water is something which I believe will ensure we have healthier communities. There are many issues facing our reserves and we would like to see the government take this issue and demonstrate its commitment to try to improve the infrastructure of our reserves, to improve the quality of life on our reserves. This is one of those issues which the government can demonstrate very clearly a sense of commitment to make a difference.

About six weeks ago someone approach me about the apology. He commented that it was nice, but he wanted to see something that was more tangible for now. It was not to belittle what the government had done. There was great recognition for the apology for the residential schools, and it was very well received, but for him, it had gone past that. He said that we needed to look at other conditions. I cannot recall, but I would be surprised if we did not talk about water at that time. Fresh food and products is always a very major issue, but water leads it.

• (1245)

Mr. John Carmichael (Don Valley West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague opposite for his thoughtful remarks. It is clear that we would all agree this is something many of us take for granted, but it is a very important issue that we expect should be addressed. To that end, the *Winnipeg Free Press* published a series of articles in 2010 and 2011, highlighting the lack of running water in the Island Lake first nations.

Could the hon. member give us his thoughts with regard to the assertions made in that series of articles?

• (1250)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I have actually been provided one of the articles. It is a fairly lengthy, detailed article that Mia Rabson from the *Winnipeg Free Press* has written. It states from the beginning:

The chief of a northern Manitoba First Nation says his reserve is nearing a water crisis after more than half of the band's residents were cut off from a primitive water system.

On Monday, Red Sucker Lake Chief Larry Knott ordered residents to stop using water from the holding tanks beneath their homes after four tanks were randomly tested and all contained bacteria. More than 100 houses in Red Sucker Lake use the tanks...

It goes on. It is a very good story and that is why I make reference to it. It is always encouraging when we get media outlets that pick up on those social policies that need to be brought to the public's attention. I enjoyed reading the story but, more important, I hope many people had the opportunity, like my colleague from across the way, to recognize it.

Now it is up to us to do what we can and, from my capacity, to provide accountability and try to encourage and promote, however I can, the government to come into Manitoba and to demonstrate the leadership that is needed to make the difference with providing water.

[Translation]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased that we can talk about this major issue for the aboriginal communities—although it is unfortunate that it is still an issue in 2011. I represent the NDP on the Standing Committee on Health where I am responsible for aboriginal health issues. Every

time I ask our witnesses in committee to tell us what the federal government can do to improve health for the aboriginal peoples, who have a number of health problems—often more than the general public—they often tell me the same thing: improve their basic sanitary conditions. This includes better housing to ensure that the problem of overcrowding does not affect public health, and it also includes improving the drinking water supply.

I am quite pleased that the Liberals have proposed this discussion today. I simply want to agree with the hon. Liberal member that, in 2011, it is high time for the Conservative government to address the drinking water problem in aboriginal communities to ensure that the aboriginal peoples can finally enjoy decent living conditions and flourish like all other Canadians.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I would agree. There is the expectation that people living on reserves are entitled to have living conditions that are far more acceptable than what they have today. There is no doubt that, between our first nations and our federal government, we are never going to achieve that unless there is a better sense of co-operation. In that co-operation, the government needs to come to the table with the necessary resources.

Quite often, that also means working with other stakeholders like our provinces. They too have a vested interest. When we talk about poor quality water and we get children who are sick as a result of it, they then go into our health care facilities more often than they would normally have to, or require health care services. Those are provincially administered. There needs to be more co-operation.

First nations people have been very good at hammering it out how important this issue is and they are bringing it to the government. They are saying that they need the help and the government needs to respond. We need a government today to say that it understands the problem, that it is prepared to deal with the problem, that it will work with the Premier of Manitoba and the first nations of Manitoba and that it will resolve it in Manitoba. Then the government needs to apply the principle to wherever else might be needed.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the work my colleague has done on this file and in the past in the provincial chamber in Manitoba.

In first nation communities probably one of the most alarming health outcomes is the increase in obesity and diabetes. The member commented about access to dairy products such as milk and just how prohibitive the costs were to buy those products in northern communities.

With illnesses caused by bad water and access to drinking water, does the member think that would also have a significant impact on the occurrence of diabetes and obesity, two alarming health outcomes we have seen in first nation communities over the years?

● (1255)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, absolutely. Over the years that I served as an MLA, I heard some horror stories. I like to use milk as an example because I introduced a bill on numerous occasions, which unfortunately did not pass. However, the health issue is such a big concern on our reserves. Providing clean flowing, drinkable water would make a huge impact in the health conditions in those communities.

I believe there are very few members in this chamber who have an excellent appreciation as to the actual health conditions of the children who live on reserves today. When we talk about FASD, diabetes or obesity, they are serious issues. That is why I believe the Government of Canada needs to be more sensitive to what the leadership of our first nations people are saying and to create the dialogue that is necessary in order to start to resolve some of these issues.

There is no reason why first nations cannot have clean flowing water. There is no reason why the parents of those children should not be able to afford to buy milk more so than pop. It is endless in terms of the examples. It is all about stakeholders getting together and acting on some of the concerns the chiefs and others have sent to Ottawa, to the local legislatures and others.

Mr. Greg Rickford (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am absolutely delighted to stand in this place to speak to this issue.

Perhaps somewhat uniquely, it may be useful not just for the member from the opposition who tabled the motion, but for the one who just spoke to know that I spent eight years of my life living and working in isolated and remote first nations communities as a nurse before being elected to this place. Furthermore, I worked consultatively and in a legal capacity to deal in no small part with a number of issues not just around health, but particularly as they might relate to safe potable drinking water and responsible waste water treatment.

I am glad that the member who tabled the motion has had somewhat of an epiphany. While he was the premier of the province of Ontario and while the Liberal Party was governing Canada at that time, I was actually a nurse working up in those communities. I can assure him that it would have been great if they not only could have acted on a number of these structural challenges that are related to safe, potable drinking water then, but also developed a responsible and strategic policy platform. Had that occurred, I have no doubt we would not be in this situation.

To frame this debate as an intellectual and a practical matter, it is important to understand what has gone on here today from this side of the House, and that is a willingness to be open, frank and transparent about the reality of this debate, where our action is and where it is headed. There are three key areas: capacity, legislation and infrastructure.

I am pleased to report to the House that unlike any other exercise taken certainly in modern political times, in 2006 we started out with a coast to coast to coast consultation with technical experts around

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the issue of first nations and providing safe potable drinking water and waste water treatment for those communities. We spoke at length with community members. We talked to departmental policy people. That consultation was uniquely and importantly in co-operation with the Assembly of First Nations.

Flowing from that process, a couple of key things happened. I want to speak very briefly to those. First, the minister, as he pointed out today, directed a report to be done. That information was consolidated in a comprehensive way so that we understood what pillars ought to form in an effort to overcome the structural challenges in more than 600 first nations communities. Many of them are isolated and remote. Many of them pose specific technical problems for the development of safe drinking water and waste water treatment, challenges that are not so common to communities in the southern part of the country.

We embrace the findings of the report. We are happy to report that we were acting on those issues long before the report came out. Moving forward, we need to understand the importance of developing capacity, and the ability of the communities to do responsible reporting, monitoring and maintenance of some of these highly sophisticated pieces of critical infrastructure.

I am pleased to report that in the great Kenora riding, our investments have included working with Northern Waterworks and forming partnerships with Confederation College in an effort to ensure that members of these first nations communities can come to a centre in Red Lake, in Dryden and/or in Kenora to get the technical certifications they require to operate these pieces of infrastructure and to do the reporting and the maintenance. In more than a few cases, these first nations folks have gone back to their communities and have been making serious inroads on the reporting, maintenance and operation of these facilities. Ironically, their degree of certification has put them in demand in communities across the great Kenora riding and in fact across the country.

● (1300)

In some instances, the minister and I had an opportunity to travel to parts of Quebec where we saw first-hand first nations communities and municipalities sharing not just the infrastructure itself but the technical capacity which is so essential to provide safe drinking water and waste water treatment.

Earlier this morning we heard the minister speak passionately and eloquently about the legislation that needs to be in place. We have identified from our coast to coast to coast consultations the need to have an enforceable piece of legislation that is more than just a frame of reference for the first nations and aboriginal communities. Also, the government needs to create standards that deal with some of the challenges that the jurisdictions have posed.

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For example, our government took a responsible approach to this as we did our analysis of high risk communities. We found that from one province to another there were some parts of the legislation which were not the same. The federal government made a responsible decision at that time in terms of assessing the risk category for those first nations communities. We found that we ought to identify how to fill that vacuum and ensure that first nations communities across the country had a nationalized standard. This would fill a legal vacuum which was identified as a long-standing problem. As I mentioned in my introductory remarks, these problems are not a phenomenon of the last four years; they go back several decades.

I appreciated hearing from the member who tabled this motion earlier today. This issue is so serious that we ought not to be in an exercise of one-upmanship. We have done so much lately, particularly in the last four years, thoughtfully and comprehensively to embrace the findings, for example, of the Neegan Burnside report to address these issues.

Finally, there is no dispute that we need to continue to build on the infrastructure challenges that first nations communities across the region face. I am pleased to report that even before the coast to coast to coast consultation began, we were dealing with some of the findings of a previous government dating back to 2001. We moved very quickly to address some of the critical infrastructure. I have been involved in my region and across northern Ontario. I have attended the grand openings of a number of water treatment facilities and waste water treatment plants.

This is an ongoing cyclical process. At times it is highly technical depending on the kinds of surfaces that may exist in a first nation community. For example, in the Island Lake region and on the tundra, similar to the great Kenora riding, there is a serious challenge in terms of laying pipes in and around or underneath the rock.

I speak from considerable experience. I was the nurse in charge of St. Theresa Point, one of the four communities in the Island Lake region, for some time. I saw first-hand back in the late 1990s and early 2000s that these challenges were there. I had a chance to work through some of the health problems those communities faced as a result of this ongoing challenge. These are things we have to keep in mind.

This will help us organize the discussion around those three things that we have done.

We remained committed from the outset to a five point plan of action for drinking water in first nations communities. Moving forward, it is our intention in the immediate year to address the solid evidence flowing from these reports that tell us which communities need critical infrastructure. We are going to act on that.

In addition, there is a plan for the completion of more than 57 water systems over the next four years.

• (1305)

There are plans to invest in almost 25% of the water systems that the national assessment identified, which I referred to earlier as high overall risk.

By any measure this is an ambitious goal. It is an important investment. I am delighted to hear that the Liberal Party is finally on board with us in terms of these measures. It is important to say that some progress had been made back in the day, and that those governments moved to understand on a community to community basis what challenges were being posed at the time.

What is great about what we have been doing for the last four or five years is that instead of just labelling something as being nationalized, we actually have a national strategy that brings together all of the essential components of the road map moving forward. I spoke about the three pillars, but again by way of review, it is important to understand that technical experts and community members were involved in this. At the time I was legal counsel in the Kenora riding working with community members to help them describe in layperson terms some of the challenges and technical terms. Some of them just wanted to bounce ideas off me, and I was more than pleased to work with them in that regard.

Importantly, perhaps for the first time in a long time, if ever, on a key file like this, we worked in full partnership with the AFN to identify the determinants of a successful road map to deal with ensuring that the ultimate goal would be the kind of safe potable drinking water and appropriate waste water treatment which, I think it is fairly safe to say, a number of Canadians in other communities would not so much take for granted—that would be unfair to say because we have seen situations where these systems have broken down—but certainly would assume would be there for them.

Moving forward, I am more than pleased to say that our additional investments flowing from Canada's economic action plan have supported more than 20 accelerated waste and waste water infrastructure projects and have been essential to the communities they serve. We need to continue to build on that.

It goes without saying with respect to the pith and substance of this motion that this side of the House is in a great position not just in political terms but in terms of the deeply personal and long-standing professional experience to which I have alluded. We must continue to move forward on the trajectory that this appears to be on, which is to work with first nations communities and leadership in combination with other stakeholders which we know to be important, such as the colleges and institutions that provide the certification.

I have worked closely with the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development, and I know the minister fully understands the importance of training. These are examples of other kinds of investments, and I saw the nods of approval as the minister was speaking this morning, that are absolutely essential components to the development of a successful road map in terms of process and in terms of actual outcomes. They are essential in providing safe potable drinking water and appropriate waste water treatment, and addressing a number of health issues that have arisen in aboriginal communities across the country in the absence, from time to time, of the capacity of the infrastructure to deliver safe drinking water and appropriate waste water treatment.

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● (1310)

We want to continue to work with first nations to help achieve long-term sustainability. That is the objective. This is a file that is ongoing. Obviously, in many instances we are talking about isolated and remote communities where there are specific and unique challenges. There is a need for proper planning. For example, in the great Kenora riding, 25 of the 42 first nations communities are isolated and inaccessible by road. The delivery of equipment and materials that are going to build these communities needs to be planned.

In many instances, we are talking about the development of lagoons. Obviously the weather needs to co-operate and I will refer that matter to the Minister of the Environment. I can report, though, that the Kenora riding had a beautiful, long summer that allowed the construction of a lot of important projects, not just for safe drinking water and waste water treatment but building schools, small business centres and police stations in isolated first nations communities.

We are going to continue to work with first nations leadership. We are going to continue to listen to community members, technical experts, stakeholders such as colleges and important people like our friends at Northern Waterworks. I meet with them regularly to ensure that folks in communities have the skill sets not only to operate what is currently in place, but also to ensure that as the infrastructure is modernized they have the technical certifications to operate the new equipment.

Our investments must always be made on the basis of common sense and partnership. Solutions must be developed carefully to ensure that they meet the long-term goals of a community. In some instances, where first nations communities are adjoined or near cities, we must understand the importance of partnerships and shared resources. That means engaging a broader set of stakeholders in some instances.

The minister and I have seen real examples of how this can be successful, especially in light of our trip to Quebec. The scope of this assessment conducted by the federal government included physical inspections of 1,300 water and waste water systems, more than 800 wells and 1,900 septic fields. Inspectors visited nearly 600 communities in nine regions across the country. If colleagues are looking for a threshold test, I would submit that it is met. The national assessment is a vital part of the process to improve water and waste water systems. It is an effort to provide the most accurate account possible of the current state of these systems and their requirements moving forward.

It will help and has helped first nations communities. This government focuses its efforts on priority areas. It points to solutions and helps to ensure the maximum use of taxpayer dollars. It addresses this long-standing issue in a number of first nations communities across the country to bring safe drinking water and responsible waste water treatment to first nations communities.

I am pleased to report that on so many fronts, we are getting the job done. I appreciate the minister's robust efforts and our government's direction to get on this issue early, in partnership with first nations communities, and move forward.

● (1315)

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, generally, members who question a speaker say they listened very carefully to the hon. member's speech. The truth of the matter is I did not. I kind of tuned out after about 15 bromides and platitudes.

This is a call to action for the government. I think I lost count of how many times I heard that the government is going to work with the stakeholders, is going forward with all the plans that it is making, that it is talking to the stakeholders, working in various partnerships, et cetera. I offer insincere apologies to the hon. member for not really listening to his speech, because it is much like the minister who, when written to by my colleague from St. Paul's, indicated, "Regarding the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Government of Canada believes that the aspirational document sets out a number of principles that should guide harmonious and co-operative relationships between indigenous peoples and the states."

I think my question is relatively simple for the hon. member. When are we going to move off aspirational documents, when are we going to move off aspirational goals, when are we going to move off aspirational conversations with various stakeholders and, as the resolution says, get going by the spring of 2012?

● (1320)

Mr. Greg Rickford: Mr. Speaker, I almost need an aspirin after that question, but what is important is I have tremendous respect for the member. I always have had respect for him, but we have agreed to disagree on some issues.

It is unfortunate that he thinks that bromides and platitudes are flowing from a person who has spent the greater part of his professional life living and working in these isolated communities. He can disagree, but to say that the speech that I just gave, or some of the actions are bromides and platitudes, to say that the AFN, which was very adamant about a process that included it in this assessment, is a bromide and a platitude is disrespectful.

I am going to rise above the fray and say there is nothing about this that is a platitude when we look at the money that we have put into waste water treatment plants and water treatment plants across this country since 2006.

I was in those communities a long time before I came into this place and I take this issue very seriously. Major investments have been made. A strategic plan that is already delivering results was prescient to many of the points that these assessments and the reports identified.

I do not think it is a bromide or a platitude when a number of first nations communities in my riding have real technical certificates to operate the sophisticated equipment, which they did not back in the 1990s and early 2000s when that party was in power.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I do not really want to get into he said, she said and they did, we did. I want to ask a very simple question.

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Every one of us in this room knows that water is recognized as a right by the international community.

I have very young children. I have grandchildren, too. Would I want them growing up in communities where there is not clean water? I would say, categorically, no.

It makes very little difference to me that these little steps are being taken because today we still have children living in deplorable conditions without access to safe drinking water.

Is the government ready to commit all the necessary resources to ensure every Canadian child has access to clean drinking water, which is an internationally recognized human right?

Mr. Greg Rickford: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the passion with which the hon. member put her question. I would respond with a similar degree of passion by saying that the government took no little step in its action when between 2006-07 and 2012-13 budget cycles we have spent approximately \$2.5 billion on this file.

If the member wants inspiration, we can give her as many examples as she wants of grassroots-level approaches. People are getting technical certificates. Investments are being made in partnerships with colleges and organizations that can do the training. Facilities are being rehabilitated or replaced to deal with safe drinking water and with waste water treatment.

This government recognized this issue with respect to its international scope and implications. Our goal is to ensure that first nations communities, particularly communities in isolated and remote areas, get the technical support and infrastructure support they need to build the kind of infrastructure that would deliver on exactly what the member is asking.

• (1325)

Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member gave a fine presentation. It was very informative, although some people may not appreciate the information. It may be too technical for them to absorb. We trust they will be okay with it.

I am wondering why the national assessment results demonstrated such a large increase in risk systems when compared to previous reporting done by the department. There seems to be quite a spike there. I am wondering if my colleague might touch on that for us.

Mr. Greg Rickford: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the important work that the member is doing with the members of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

As a leader in his province in education, he appreciates the essential education component that was built into our strategy, in co-operation with AFN leadership.

These are important issues; nobody disputes that. We have the same goals. For the first time in a very long time, we have a comprehensive, substantive plan that is already delivering on the results.

The national assessment has been the most rigorous and comprehensive evaluation of water and waste water systems on reserve ever undertaken. In the two years between July 2009 and spring 2011, engineers inspected many different on-reserve systems,

1,300 water and waste water systems, 800 wells and 571 first nations communities.

What they brought forward had to be dealt with in a comprehensive manner in co-operation with first nations stakeholders. The joint action plan and the water action plan with aboriginal communities across Canada had to be capable, unlike reports we had seen earlier in 2001 which were incomplete and fell well short of what was required.

We are working with haste toward the goal of safe drinking water and responsible waste water treatment.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure to speak in this debate because, as many of my colleagues know, water issues are something in which I have a profound interest and have been working on almost since being elected in 2004. Of course, there is perhaps no more urgent water issue in this country today than the quality of drinking water available to our first nations people on first nations reserves.

It is vitally important, in a country like Canada, that no citizen living in a community, however small, be without access to potable water. It is impossible to understand how, in a country like Canada, citizens living in a community would not have access to water for sanitation. We know, and it has been said before in this House today and many times before today, that water is central to proper sanitation. Without proper sanitation, we have outbreaks of epidemics, like H1N1, because people cannot wash their hands or otherwise maintain proper sanitation. Therefore, the issue of quality drinking water and quality water for sanitation is not just a question of having access to the immediate household staple of quality water, it is a question of public health.

I must congratulate my hon. leader for sponsoring this motion today on such an important issue. The impetus for this motion comes from a report released in July 2011 called the National Assessment of First Nation Water and Wastewater Systems. Just by way of background, I will mention that the study covered 97% of first nations. Four first nations chose not to participate in the study but 97% of first nations were covered. Although I am not a statistician, I know that 97% coverage is a very strong sample size.

The study found that if we want to bring first nations drinking water up to standard, we need to spend a fair amount of money still. Even though there have been investments in the past, we need to spend \$1.08 billion in construction costs and \$79.8 million in non-construction costs to bring all existing systems up to INACs protocol standards. The non-construction costs would involve spending on operator training and the development of various kinds of plans.

Finally, the costs of new servicing, including construction, operation and maintenance costs over a 10 year period are estimated at \$4.7 billion. As members can see, there is a need for an infusion of resources if we are to do justice by our first nations people.

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I will go back to a 2005 report by the Commissioner of Environment and Sustainable Development, which I read very carefully. From the report, we learned that 460,000 first nations people in Canada live on reserves, that Canada has about 600 first nations communities and that, of those communities, about 78,000 first nations people live in about 90 isolated communities without any year-round road access.

● (1330)

Providing potable water and access to water for sanitation to first nations is not an optional policy choice for the current government or any other government. The federal government has a fiduciary responsibility for the health and well-being of aboriginal Canadians living on first nations reserves. That is without dispute. This fiduciary responsibility includes ensuring that first nations communities have access to safe drinking water.

By way of information, the federal government exercises direct responsibility for first nations drinking water in those communities located south of 60, while the territorial governments do so for communities north of 60.

Again, by way of background, there are two federal departments that are the most directly involved in ensuring first nations communities have access to safe drinking water, one being what was formerly called the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, INAC, and the other being Health Canada. INAC funds the cost of building and maintaining first nations drinking water systems in communities. The department also covers the costs of operating and maintaining these systems, including the costs for training and certifying water system operators. In addition, the department tests source waters that supply first nations drinking water treatment plants. That is very important, and I will get into this a little later.

The efficacy of a water treatment plant depends, not only on the technology in that plant but also on the source water that is feeding that plant. Therefore, it is extremely important that we protect source water in Canada, specifically source water that is very close to drinking water treatment plants.

Health Canada, on the other hand, tests first nations drinking water at the tap. Health Canada works with first nations south of 60 to identify potential drinking water problems, including verification and monitoring of the overall quality of drinking water at the tap, and we are not talking about source water, and reviewing, interpreting and disseminating results to first nations.

Environment Canada is a third department. I said that there were two departments principally involved with the issue of first nations drinking water but Environment Canada is also involved. It is involved in giving advice and guidance in the area of source water protection.

A fourth department that is also involved is Public Works and Government Services Canada. Already we can see that this is a complex problem. Yes, it is a problem of money and a problem of political will but it is also a problem of the structure and the processes of government. I will come back to that a bit later.

What does Public Works and Government Services Canada do? Public Works and Government Services Canada provides Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development with technical services on the

design of water treatment plants. If the government were putting out tenders to build water treatment plants, obviously this would go through Public Works and Government Services and it would supply some technical specifications. We already have four departments involved.

I mentioned money and money is important. In fact, one of the reasons that first nations were against Bill S-11 was because it proposed a regime for creating regulations to govern drinking water on first nations reserves but there did not seem to be any money attached to that law. A law without the resources to implement the law is not much of a law at all. It is just wishful thinking. I would point out that spending on first nations water needs has not kept pace with the growth of the aboriginal population in Canada.

There is another problem with government when it comes to ensuring quality drinking water on first nations reserves. Yes, there are the four departments. They have complex relationships among themselves. Yes, there is the problem of not having enough money to solve this problem. There is also the problem that it is fundamentally a scientific issue.

● (1335)

Water policy must be based on science. Water policy requires that the government have the scientific resources to identify problems that need to be solved. I talked about how Environment Canada looks after the protection of source waters on first nations communities but it needs to have scientists to do that job properly. What we have seen in the last few years, and even more so at an accelerated pace, is that the government does not seem to have the resources to hire scientists. In fact, the talk at Fisheries and Oceans and at Environment Canada is that not only are scientists not allowed to speak and are muzzled and discouraged from doing their work, but we see that there will probably be, as a result of budget cuts, fewer and fewer scientists working inside Environment Canada and Fisheries and Oceans.

The atrophied state of federal water science is a component of this problem. It is not something that we notice right off the bat. We said that it was a question of money, of political will, and, yes, it is a question of those things, but when we scratch under the surface we cannot have good water policy, whether we are talking about water on first nations reserves or any other aspect of water policy, unless we have good science.

Here is what is extremely interesting and sadly ironic. There are no laws and regulations governing the provision of drinking water in first nations communities, unlike other communities in Canada. This is a situation where the federal government has a fiduciary responsibility to guarantee adequate drinking water to first nations and yet there are no laws or regulations governing the provision of drinking water in first nations communities.

What is even more ironic is that if people are nurses employed by the federal government working in a nursing station on a first nations reserve, or if they are employees of the Department of Foreign Affairs working in an embassy somewhere around the world, they are governed by regulations. The government must provide them with drinking water that is up to standard.

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This is not me speaking. It was mentioned by the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development. I will read a passage from his 2005 report:

Under the Canada Labour Code and the Occupational Safety and Health Regulations, every federally regulated employer has to provide its employees with drinking water that meets the standards set out in the Guidelines for Canadian Drinking Water Quality. Federal employees working in First Nations communities are covered by these regulations.

Is that not ironic? Aboriginal Canadians living in these communities are not covered by regulations but federal employees working there are. I will continue with the quote:

We found that in 2002 Health Canada installed small water treatment units in nursing clinics and health stations in at least 20 First Nations communities that were regularly experiencing drinking water safety problems. This was a result of Human Resources and Development Canada intervention to ensure that federal employees working in these facilities would be provided with safe drinking water as prescribed under the Canada Labour Code.

This is an irony that cannot be allowed to stand much further. This is obviously a glaring problem.

● (1340)

This is a complex issue and there is a scientist, Dr. Hans Peterson, who works in the north and who has dedicated a tremendous amount of time in his career to helping first nations communities solve their drinking water problems. He has found that water filtration is by no means a simple and straightforward matter. It is not a question of just installing, plugging in, and activating a filtration unit. The kind of filtration system a community requires depends on the quality of its source water, which I mentioned earlier.

This comes back to the issue of lack of coordination. In many cases, filtration system designers, who may even be located in an engineering firm in another country, have limited knowledge of the characteristics of source water in the community in question. Obviously, this is ironic.

According to Dr. Peterson, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, which was INAC at the time, appeared less than interested in the complexities of the relationship between source water type, filtration system design, and the quality of the treated water at the tap.

In the case of a water treatment plant being built in Saskatchewan, which goes back a couple of years, Dr. Peterson stated:

—INAC's only criteria for building a water treatment system in Saskatchewan is still an 'engineering stamp'. To the best of SDWF's knowledge, and in discussion with the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers, engineers have also not been given the opportunity to advise INAC on the most effective systems for different source waters, as INAC is only interested in requesting bids for, and purchasing, specific conventional water treatment systems that are chosen based on the cheapest bid.

It is not just a question of money or political will, it is a question of coordination among the various government departments that have something to say about first nations drinking water.

Again I will quote Dr. Peterson, who in this particular quotation seemed to be pointing to the lack of coordination between Health Canada and Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. It is an old quotation. He stated:

INAC and HC do not appear to share data for source and treated waters and, as such, are unable to make sound decisions on effective treatment processes—

The list goes on and on.

There was a report published maybe three or four years ago which was published following consultations with first nations communities. What came out of that report was the recommendation that a first nations water commission be created where members of first nations could be brought together to share information relating to the provision of potable water in these communities. To my knowledge, the government has not acted on that recommendation. I think it is a good recommendation. It gets first nations communities involved in decision-making about water treatment in their communities. I would heartily recommend that the government pursue the issue and implement that recommendation.

Lastly, it is very important that the government not take the easy way out. Through legislation and regulation it should not impose provincial drinking water standards on first nations communities because not all provinces have drinking water standards that are at the level of the national drinking water guidelines. By doing so, it would skirt its federal responsibility, which would not be fair to the first nations people of the country.

● (1345)

Mr. Greg Rickford (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's comments at the very end. I thought it was one of the more important parts of his speech. That is exactly what we want to do, which is to develop a federal framework or piece of legislation that the federal government and the first nations communities can count on for enforceable standards.

What I always appreciate, although perhaps somewhat unfairly, and find ironic is when a member of the Liberal Party uses words like "fiduciary duty".

He mentioned nurses working in those isolated communities. Maybe he was not here when I spoke just prior, but I was actually a nurse working in these isolated communities between the years 1992 and 2006, and have taken my share of distilled bottled water showers when those fragile water systems failed. Therefore, I agree with the member that it is important and that we need legislation.

However, in the absence of real standards that the government and first nations could have counted on then, will the member support our piece of legislation coming forward that, in a profound, meaningful and substantive way, will attempt to bring in regulations for us all to depend on to ensure first nations have access to safe drinking water and appropriate waste water treatment?

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: First, Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend and congratulate the hon. member on the good work he did in the north in helping to provide health care for our aboriginal brothers and sisters. No doubt he would agree with the quote I read from the 2005 report of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development.

In terms of legislation and regulations, we would have to see what that legislation is, what those regulations are. We would have to know if there is money to back up the legislation. We would have to know if first nations communities agree with the legislation, if they feel they have been properly consulted, and again, as a member of the Liberal opposition, I want to avoid any possibility that the federal government would wash its hands of its fiduciary responsibilities for first nations drinking water by having provincial standards apply to these communities.

We need to have the best federal standards apply to these communities. Not only that, our federal standards need to be brought up to EPA standards similar to those in the U.S.

• (1350)

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when I speak to the first nations in my community, whether it be Kitigan or Barriere Lake, there is just at this point an incredible amount of frustration.

This is a problem that has existed for decades. The Liberal and Conservative governments really have done very little to deal with the situation. Frankly, the people are at the end of their rope. They are impatient and I understand them.

I do support, of course, the principle of the motion, but I would like to hear the member's ideas as to why this extremely urgent issue has not been dealt with adequately in the decades that have transpired.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the experience the hon. member has on this issue by virtue of the fact that he has the Algonquins of Barriere Lake in his community. I have many good friends in that community. I do not know if he knows Dave Nawhegaw, someone I have known for a very long time.

Why have we not resolved this problem to this point? I agree it is very complex and technical. I mentioned that in addition to money and political will, which previous governments have had, the member would have to admit, there is a structural management and coordination problem within government.

It was the report, for example, of the Safe Drinking Water Foundation that helped us uncover that problem. I would hope that the government would address that problem as well as investing more money.

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would also like to commend the remarks made by my colleague and remind the House of his good work at the environment committee of several years ago which led to the new agreement between the federal government and the provincial government of Alberta, which is now monitoring water and water quality around the Athabasca River and the oil sands. I think folks should be reminded of that.

He did touch on the question of science cuts, which is eerily reminiscent of the cuts we saw, in my case, in my home province of Ontario some eleven years ago. Those cuts, science cuts and water inspection cuts, led to the terrible tragedy of Walkerton, where seven people died and 2,500 people were sick, some of whom are still battling with the terrible diseases that flowed from that tragedy.

What is perhaps most astonishing is that we actually have to remind the government of the urgency to act in this regard. We have

Business of Supply

a Minister of Finance, a Minister of Foreign Affairs, a President of the Treasury Board, a Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, and a smattering of parliamentary secretaries and government MPs who served in the Ontario government and who were held responsible by Mr. Justice Dennis O'Connor in his report on the Walkerton crisis.

Why it takes the opposition Liberal Party, and the good work of my colleague here, and our leader to raise the urgency of this matter is all the more astonishing. Perhaps my colleague might take a moment to comment on that sense of urgency.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank the hon. member for his kind words for the work that we both did, and in fact that the Liberals did on the environment committee to raise the profile of an issue which actually had something to do with source water protection, and that was the monitoring of the impact of the oil sands on the Athabasca River watershed.

I travelled with the committee. We went up to Fort Chipewyan, and first nations citizens there were telling us that they feared that their source water was being polluted by deposits of deleterious substances from the oil sands industry.

The lesson of Walkerton teaches us that we need government supervision. Whenever we decide to cut back on government expenditures, we should be very careful not to cut back in areas that affect people's health. We should always give the benefit of the doubt to proper regulation and oversight by government over other considerations.

I would like to end with a little anecdote. We have heard of Walkerton. We have heard of problems in first nations communities. I live in a suburban riding. My riding covers the western tip of the island of Montreal. It is pure suburb. About a month ago all the cities in my riding were told they could not drink the water for four days. Fortunately, everything was okay.

We found out that everything was fine. The municipal authorities reacted very well. I was very proud of Mayor Bill McMurchie of Pointe-Claire and other mayors in the community, including John Meaney. I will say that panic started to set in, in a suburban community on the island of Montreal.

• (1355)

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member just answered a question from one of his colleagues who asked why it has taken action by the Liberal Party to bring this to the government's attention when it is such an urgent issue.

I wonder if the member had maybe forgotten that, in fact, his party was in government for 13 years? It had 13 years to deal with this urgent issue, and it did not do it. I would just like the member to respond to that.

As well, the member brought up the issue of the oil sands and the feeling that there was contamination from the oil sands in the water supply. I am sure the member would, in fact, tell the House that the feeling may have been there, but the pollution was not there and the contamination was not there. Could the member comment on that as well?

Statements by Members

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, in terms of the oil sands, the member is forgetting that his government did a 180 degree turn on this issue.

Up until about a year and a half ago, the standard line coming out of PMO and the environment minister's office was that all traces of bitumen found in the Athabasca River were naturally occurring as the result of the oozing of bitumen from the banks of the Athabasca.

The work by Dr. David Schindler, Canada's foremost water scientist and one of the international community's great water scientists, proved through scientific study that there was a problem, and again we are coming back to the science. I would add that that study was not done with federal funds. He could not find federal funds to do the study. He did it on his own; a semi-retired aquatic biologist did the study. We backed him up in committee with our own policy study. As a result, the Minister of the Environment at the time had to get up and do a 180 and tell Canadians that in fact there was a problem in the oil sands.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the Liberals and Conservatives blaming each other for inaction on drinking water on first nations reserves.

I would like to take this opportunity to draw attention to the Pacheedaht First Nation in my riding. I met with its representatives last week. They have been waiting for more than a decade for a solution to their drinking water problems. Right now they run a rudimentary system of one pump and a backup. The backup no longer works.

If that fails, there will be an immediate health crisis on the Pacheedaht First Nation. It has had a proposal in to build its own filtration plant with new pumps. The proposal has been with INAC for five months. It is still waiting for an answer.

The last time the pumps broke down, it spent two years on bottled water. In that two years, INAC spent more than twice the amount of money on bottled water than it would have spent to build the filtration plant.

There is a great deal of frustration because the attitude at INAC seems to be that once again they are looking for a feasibility study from the regional district or a private company. INAC lacks confidence in the Pacheedaht First Nation to build and run its own system. This problem could have been solved years ago.

I would ask the member whether it is simply a technical problem or a coordination problem, or is it really a failure to trust a first nation and give it the resources it needs to solve its own problems?

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for raising that particular case, but I am not familiar with it.

When I say it is not always a matter of political will I am saying yes, there seems to be political will to solve the problem, but the political will cannot just be superficially expressed. In this particular case, the political will should translate into concrete action on the ground.

Yes, first nations peoples need to be involved in decisions regarding their water treatment plants. That is why the idea of a first nations water commission is a good one. I would go even further and

say that a first nations water commission should be an umbrella group and that each community should have a water council. Yes, there could be representatives from Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, Environment Canada, Health Canada, and Public Works and Government Services. We can get people talking and then translate the political will into action.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

● (1400)

[English]

HILLCREST LODGE

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I am pleased to bring attention to the success of an innovative seniors' housing initiative in my riding called Hillcrest Lodge.

For low-income seniors in our area facing illness, isolation and risks to their safety, Hillcrest is setting a new standard. It has created a community where quality housing, safety, good food and camaraderie have transformed the quality of life for some of our most vulnerable.

At Hillcrest, the cost of rent, utilities, meals and insurance is well below 60% of the average \$16,000 a year that a low-income senior lives on. The residents have independence; a safe, inviting home; and a caring staff. I hope the Hillcrest model will spur the creation of more of these affordable assisted-living communities in the years ahead.

I would like to take this time to congratulate the Hillcrest volunteer board of directors and their partners, like Helping Hands and Community Care Access. They are working together to make supportive, assisted living a reality for seniors in our region.

[Translation]

DEMOCRACY

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in 1956, the Speaker of the House and hon. member for Vaudreuil-Soulanges, Louis-René Beaudoin, had to end his political career after shutting down an important debate on the construction of a pipeline. Closure of that debate caused such an uproar that chaos reigned in the House for weeks.

Here we are 55 years later and we see closure invoked on a weekly basis. Preventing debate has become a habit for this government. The Conservatives brag about how wonderful democracy is the world over, but they are having a hard time practising it here in this House.

What are they afraid of? Do they think that shutting down the debates will prevent Canadians from noticing the flaws and nonsense in their answers?

* * *

[English]

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have more good news to report for the great Kenora riding. AbitibiBowater recently announced they have purchased, and are fast under way in retrofitting and modernizing, a dormant building in the beautiful town of Ignace. More than 100 well-paying permanent jobs will return to the community very soon, just like the 600,000 other jobs our government has helped produce with Canada's economic action plan.

This is testament to the resolve and resilience of the folks in Ignace, who have always believed that their town has a future in forestry and other industries just on the horizon.

I want to thank the past and present mayors and councils with whom I have had the privilege of working and who have believed that if we could rehabilitate or replace critical infrastructure, Ignace would get a serious look from traditional and new industrial growth. That is exactly what Canada's economic action plan addressed in the Ignace area, putting Ignace in the best possible position for sustainability and growth.

Congratulations to AbitibiBowater and the citizens of Ignace. They are just another example of what is so great about the great Kenora riding.

* * *

YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for many years different governments have tried to tackle the challenges surrounding poverty in Canada. We are a rich country and we all do our best to help others. Yet, as youth critic, it bothers me greatly to know that more than 65,000 young Canadians at any given time during the year can be homeless.

While all the different parties are working to find solutions to this issue, why not set a reminder or a time in our busy lives one day a year when we get to ask ourselves, what have we done to help put an end to youth homelessness?

A national youth homelessness awareness day would be that one small step in the right direction. We need all parties, together with the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development in particular, to come together and support this motion.

Let us show Canadians that when it comes to our young people and their well-being, we can do the right thing and be non-partisan in creating this annual reminder to us and to all that we need to address the root causes of youth homelessness.

* * *

• (1405)

FOREIGN CREDENTIAL RECOGNITION

Mr. Devinder Shory (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, thousands of Canadians still face challenges in having their foreign

qualifications recognized, and I have promised my constituents that I will not let this issue die.

While many Canadians struggle to navigate confusing recognition pathways, life goes on. Hard-working foreign-trained professionals do what needs to be done: they drive cabs, clean offices, or work in warehouses, but many get stuck.

Now some people say that the safest place to have a heart attack in Canada might be the back seat of a taxi; the chances are that it is a doctor driving.

The foreign-trained professionals I have spoken with are thankful that our Conservative government is taking the lead in exploring new ways to shorten the qualifications recognition process. They are also encouraged to see all levels of government working co-operatively under the pan-Canadian framework to find ways to shorten and expedite the process.

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[Translation]

POVERTY

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am sad to say that there has been a sharp increase in poverty in the riding of Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, mainly due to the Conservatives' inaction. In fact, they have not acted decisively to counter job losses, especially in the industrial sector, where 350,000 jobs have been eliminated and replaced only by precarious, poorly paid and, often, part-time jobs.

At present, in my riding of Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, too many people have to use food banks and turn to social housing to have a roof over their heads at a reasonable cost.

There are people in my riding who run food banks, provide meals on wheels, and work in community kitchens. They are much more compassionate than the members of the Conservative Party.

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[English]

SALVATION ARMY

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to congratulate Salvation Army Commissioner Brian Peddle, and his wife, commissioner Rosalie Peddle, on their appointment as the territorial commander for Canada and Bermuda, and territorial president of women's ministries, respectively.

Statements by Members

The Salvation Army is the largest non-governmental provider of social services in Canada. Last year, in 400 communities across our nation, the Salvation Army assisted over 1.6 million people in need, through addiction programs, homeless and street youth programs, palliative care and emergency disaster relief.

The Salvation Army has also been at the forefront of national and international efforts to end modern day slavery by raising awareness in communities and providing invaluable shelter and rehabilitation to survivors.

I want to congratulate Commissioners Brian and Rosalie Peddle on their appointments and commend the Salvation Army for its commitment to the hope and dignity of all people.

* * *

HOLODOMOR MEMORIAL DAY

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on November 26 I encourage everyone to commemorate the victims of the Ukrainian genocide of 1932-33. In 2008, this day was enshrined in legislation as Holodomor Memorial Day after a bill was introduced by my distinguished colleague from Selkirk—Interlake.

The Holodomor represents a period when Stalin's communist regime engineered a famine. Stalin's government imposed exorbitant grain quotas—in some cases confiscating supplies down to the last seed.

Soviet armed units surrounded the Ukrainian population in the Kuban region and in Ukraine, and prevented people from obtaining food in the neighbouring Soviet regions. The result was the death of millions, in what can only be described as one of the most horrific genocides in history.

As chair of the Canada-Ukraine Parliamentary Friendship Group, I respectfully urge all members to take a few moments to remember the men, women and children who lost their lives in the Holodomor genocide.

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WORLD PREMATURITY DAY

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, to mark the first World Prematurity Day, parents of premature babies and the staff from Edmonton neonatal intensive care units are today launching a campaign for extended parental leave to ensure proper care for infants born prematurely or with serious illnesses.

Some babies spend weeks to months in the intensive care unit. Some require multiple surgeries. Of necessity, the majority of paid parental leave is spent in hospital with the infants. As a result, the parents lose their usual one year at home with their healthy, well-developing child.

Doctors advise that parental participation in infant care is essential in intensive care. Yet many families face ongoing challenges once home. These parents need and deserve additional time with their children before returning to work.

On behalf of these children and their families, I call on the government to extend the allowed one year of paid parental leave for any parents caring for premature infants.

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●(1410)

[Translation]

NATIONAL FIELD LACROSSE CHAMPIONSHIP

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Eastern Townships received some great news when the Gaiters of Bishop's University in Lennoxville won the Canadian University Field Lacrosse Association's national championship.

The tournament was held in London, Ontario, on November 10.

Bishop's University defeated the Brock Badgers 11 to 6 in the finals. With a lead of 4 to 0, the Bishop's Gaiters prevented the Brock Badgers from scoring four consecutive times. Bishop's won the game with five unanswered goals in the last 25 minutes. The Gaiters' defence helped lead the team to its first national title.

I would like to congratulate this Quebec team of student athletes on its impressive victory in Canada's national summer sport.

Go Gaiters, go!

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[English]

NATIONAL TRANSIT STRATEGY

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to address an urgent issue in my community of Newton—North Delta and in many cities across this country. The lack of public transit for hard-working Canadian families is abysmal. Challenging economic times make affordable, accessible transit all the more important. My community has grown at an astounding rate for the past two decades, yet investment in infrastructure has lagged.

Our party is calling for a national transit strategy, a permanent investment plan for environmentally-responsible, quality transportation right across the country. Canada should be a leader on this issue. Instead, we are falling behind. Canada is the only country in the G8 without a national transit strategy.

I want to take this opportunity to urge the House to work with all levels of government to establish a national transit strategy that would benefit all hard-working Canadians.

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RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Mr. Bob Dechert (Mississauga—Erindale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this week His Holiness Pope Shenouda III celebrated the 40th anniversary of his ordination as Pope of the Coptic Orthodox Church. Anniversary celebrations recently took place in Egypt.

I would like to congratulate Pope Shenouda and his followers, many of whom live in my riding, on this very special occasion.

Our government remains very concerned about the recent violence in Egypt. Freedom of religion is a fundamental human right. I am so proud to see that our government is following through on its promise to create an office of religious freedom. While still in its planning stages, the process of establishing this office is well under way.

I am also pleased to highlight that last week our government communicated directly to the UN Secretary-General the motion which was unanimously adopted by the House and that called for an investigation into the recent violence. Canada has been clear that the violence must stop.

Our government will continue to advocate on behalf of all people of faith around the world in order that they may be able to worship in peace and security.

* * *

TOM KENT AND FRASER MUSTARD

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last night, Canada lost two of its most creative progressive thinkers with the passing of Tom Kent and Fraser Mustard.

Tom Kent served all Canadians in his many roles as journalist, editor, public servant and author, but his greatest legacy was his role in working on the groundbreaking social innovations that characterized the Pearson administration, including our national medicare system and the Canada Pension Plan.

Tom never tired from his crusade, working later in Cape Breton, and authoring solutions for social reforms well into his eighties. I can tell members that he never shrunk from challenging the leaders of today when he felt they were not doing enough to advance the cause of progress.

I also want to mark the passing of another great social reformer, and a good friend, Dr. Fraser Mustard who sadly also left us last night.

Fraser helped to build McMaster's medical school, was an pioneer in occupational health, the development of centres of excellence, and can really be called the father of early childhood development in Canada. He advised governments in Canada and around the world and was a tireless worker for better policy and better lives.

All Canadians owe Tom Kent and Dr. Fraser Mustard a debt of gratitude for their pivotal roles in shaping our nation.

Let us all resolve to take up the torch of these two great men and resolve to strive to make Canada an even more equitable, more just and more progressive nation.

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● (1415)

YUKON

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week, I had the honour of being in my wonderful riding of Yukon. During the busy week, I was pleased to announce \$900,000 in federal government funding to Yukon College for geoscience and geohydro technology

Statements by Members

programs. This will help Yukon students and workers gain certification for highly skilled work in the mining industry. An additional \$1.3 million for training simulators were given to the Yukon Mine Training Association, both were through CanNor.

While the member for Western Arctic criticizes CanNor, votes against the Dempster highway extension from Inuvik to Tukoyaktuk and refrains from standing to vote for his constituents to end the long gun registry, our government, our Prime Minister and this member of Parliament is making the north and the people there a priority.

* * *

[Translation]

CAMPAIGN FINANCING

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative Party pleaded guilty to election fraud in the amount of \$1.3 million. The party had to pay a \$52,000 fine. And yet the Conservatives referred to this as a victory. Really? A victory? Certainly, the fine is not that big a deal for a party that kept \$187,000 in illegal rebates from Canadian taxpayers.

The hon. member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands' campaign received \$1,900 in illegal rebates. The hon. member still owes Canadians this money. The hon. member for Beauce's campaign owes Canadian taxpayers \$3,000. The campaign of the hon. member for Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière and that of the Minister of Veterans Affairs each owe Canadian taxpayers \$14,000.

Taxpayers should never have to foot the bill for politics. The Prime Minister must ensure that every penny that was taken from taxpayers is given back to them immediately.

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[English]

NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the anti-trade NDP is at it again. With its anti-Canada campaign in Washington, the NDP continues to attack the Canadian economy and good jobs. Members of the NDP do not just want to put hundreds of thousands of Canadians who work directly in the oil sands out of work, but they also want to shut down a further seven major industries, including Canada's mining sector, the seal industry, the forestry sector in B.C., auto manufacturing, the trucking industry, the nuclear sector and the GM food sector. The NDP opposed creating jobs and it is actively attacking Canada abroad.

Ironically, even the private-sector union bosses disagree with the NDP and its job-killing stance against the oil sands. Unions representing hundreds of thousands of engineers, electrical workers, pipe-fitters and other trades are lining up against the NDP attacks on their jobs.

Undermining the economy and attacking Canadian jobs are yet more worrying examples that the ineffective, disunited NDP is unfit to govern.

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTIONS***[English]***PENSIONS**

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, day after day Canadian families sit and watch as their private savings evaporate on the stock market. Hard-hit families do not know how they will pay the bills, let alone how they will afford to retire.

Instead of taking practical steps to strengthen the guaranteed CPP and QPP, the government wants them to roll the dice with even more of their retirement savings.

Why is the out-of-touch Prime Minister forcing Canadians to play retirement roulette on the tumbling TSX?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have absolutely no idea what the Leader of the Opposition is talking about.

What I do know is that today the government announced another step forward on the pooled registered retirement savings plan, something that has been welcomed by pension experts and the small business community across the country. Canadians are looking for options. Canadians are not looking for a hike in their CPP premiums, as advocated by the NDP.

● (1420)

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the facts speak for themselves. In the last quarter alone, the CPP outperformed the markets ten to one.

[Translation]

The markets are tanking around the world, but the Conservatives want Canadians to invest even more of their hard-earned money in those markets without any guarantee that doing so will pay off one day.

What is the government's plan for families who are bogged down in debt and do not even have any money to save? What does the government suggest they do? Should they never retire?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today's announcement of a new retirement savings tool for companies and individuals was well received by the business community, small and medium-sized enterprises and Canadians across the country. Canadians are not looking for a hike in their CPP premiums, as advocated by the NDP.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, why would Canadians believe this government, which is sitting idly by while jobs are disappearing at an alarming rate? Just yesterday, we learned that 600 workers at the White Birch plant in Quebec City will be out of a job just before Christmas. While the number of unemployed workers is on the rise, the number of employment insurance claimants is dropping because fewer and fewer workers qualify for benefits.

The question for the Prime Minister is very simple, and Canadians want an answer: where is his plan to create jobs?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are well aware that the world economy presents challenges and that, from time to time, jobs are lost in Canada. When this sort of thing happens, we work with the communities.

[English]

It is important to say that what we do on this side of the House is work on employment and job creation. We have measures before the House to do that. What we do not do is what the NDP does, which is demand that industries be shut down, demand that taxes be raised on employers and go to other countries to fight against Canadian trade. On this side of the House, we are dedicated to fighting for Canadian jobs, not against Canadian jobs.

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PENSIONS

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today the minister said that when we buy in bulk, we save money. That is certainly true with the CPP and the QPP. In the last quarter, the CPP outperformed the markets by a ten to one factor. The chief actuary says that CPP is funded for 70 years. Increasing CPP and QPP will mean money in the pockets of retiring seniors.

Why is the government's only plan to line the pockets of mutual fund managers? Why will it not increase the CPP now?

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fact remains that today we have a good news story. We have introduced a very new pooled registered pension plan that will help millions of Canadians who otherwise have not saved for retirement.

I have to question the member's commitment to that statement when people within the CFIB have said time and time again that if we raise CPP, they are very worried about jobs, and right now we are concentrating on jobs and the economy and our low tax plan to maintain those.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister in charge of this file knows that we have been willing to work with him; in fact, we have been working with him for the past three years. New Democrats have been standing up for the tried and true Canada pension plan because that is Canadians' best option to be protected. How can people trust the government to help them when pensioners call Service Canada and are put on hold because there are not enough people? Reckless Conservative cuts at Service Canada are leaving pensioners in the cold. They are waiting months to get their cheques.

Why is the government choosing risky schemes and reckless cuts over the needs of vulnerable seniors?

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that union leaders, who are clearly very convincing for members of the opposition, are selfishly attempting to ensure that old, inefficient and labour intensive methods of processing EI applications remain in place. Our government's top priority is to get Canadians back to work and to promote economic growth. We are committed to providing timely service to all Canadians who access these systems.

* * *

• (1425)

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today in the House we are debating the question of an effective strategy for clean running water for every single Canadian across the country, and it seems to have the support of all parties as we move forward.

I would like to ask the Prime Minister, since his party has announced it is supporting this measure, could he outline what he is going to do to ensure there will be clean drinking water for every single Canadian within a fixed time point?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is no need for me to outline today that the government is willing to take action on this. The government has been taking action over the past several years. We have made significant investments in this very objective because it is important for communities, particularly native communities across Canada.

What is not explicable is why the Liberal Party continually votes against these investments, so I welcome today the Liberal Party's conversion to doing something about this issue.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we can argue about conversion dates at some other point, but let me draw the attention of the Prime Minister to one particular issue which I think requires a broader solution than the one he is prepared to take on.

The other day I visited the Six Nations reserve, which is the most highly populated reserve in the country. It has a serious drinking water problem. There are 315 homes that have no water supply whatsoever.

At the same time as the Minister of Canadian Heritage is announcing a program with respect to the War of 1812, those people who were there for Canada in 1812 to 1814 have still not had recognition of a large fundamental land claim that speaks to the land that was stolen from them over the last two centuries.

What is the Prime Minister going to do on that issue?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Liberal Party should know that obviously land claim negotiations in this particular area have been difficult and have been ongoing for some time, but we continue to work to try to get them resolved.

[Translation]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Ontario government has clearly said that this has been going on for centuries. The federal government itself recognized this fact when it made an

offer of more than \$100 million, which was turned down by the aboriginal negotiators. The Ontario government has agreed to the appointment of a mediator, but the Government of Canada refuses to appoint one.

If the government is serious, why is it not appointing a mediator to work through this major problem?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, negotiations have been ongoing for decades, at least. This government has made offers, as the leader of the Liberal Party said.

[English]

The fact of the matter is these are extremely complex negotiations. They are particularly complex given the governance structure on the other side, but we continue to work to try and get this problem resolved.

* * *

[Translation]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague and I went to Washington to tell the Americans that the majority of Canadians are opposed to the Keystone project. Our party is doing the work that the Conservatives refuse to do.

[English]

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Speaker, instead of hurling insults, maybe they should stand up for Canadians.

[Translation]

The environmental consequences of the Keystone—

[English]

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. member has about four or five seconds to complete his question.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Mr. Speaker, that is also what Canadians wanted.

Will the government finally understand that it needs to come up with a plan to protect our jobs and our environment?

[English]

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP would rather fly to Washington than listen to thousands of Canadians employed in the oil sands. Maybe they will listen to union leaders like Christopher Smillie, who represents 200,000 workers. He said "The NDP would be very bad for workers and the entire Canadian economy. They haven't risen to the task".

If the NDP will not rise to the task of supporting Canadian jobs and they are hostile to Canadian employers, whose interests do they represent in this country?

Oral Questions

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we talk with our trading partners and not at them.

We went to Washington to ensure that the voices of all Canadians were being heard, something that the government refuses to do. In Washington they are moving forward with trade on clean energy products and a clean energy economy, but because of Conservative inaction, Canada is being left behind.

These are Canadian jobs we are talking about. When will the government stop the attacks, stop the environmental inaction and move forward on building a clean energy economy for the future?

• (1430)

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been historic diplomatic trips; the allies to Yalta and Nixon to China come to mind. The sad NDP junket to Washington will not merit a footnote in the history books. However, it is a classic example of how far a party can be disconnected from the real concerns and real needs of ordinary Canadians, especially jobs and social services.

The official opposition is not ready for prime time.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if standing up for clean air and water and good Canadian jobs is sad and disconnected, bring it on.

Most Canadians do not want to sell out our environmental future and lose thousands of Canadian jobs to a risky pipeline. Our out of touch Prime Minister has said it is a no-brainer, but really it is a non-starter. Now he is talking about pushing a pipeline through the Rockies and through first nations areas, but Americans have said no to risky pipelines in sensitive areas.

When will the Prime Minister stop listening to the oil lobby and start listening to Canadians?

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the emissaries are back from their job-killing trip to Washington. They apparently felt it was their patriotic duty to block an important project that will generate jobs, economic activity and energy security. This is precisely the wrong time to block shovel ready projects.

Out of compassion for my fellow parliamentarians, I recommend the book, *Economics for Dummies*.

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Americans are seriously considering backing out of the F-35 program. It is clear what will happen if the Americans pull out. There will be no F-35 program. Yesterday, right here in the House, the Associate Minister of National Defence said, "... not only is there a plan B, but there is a plan A".

Now that it is clear that plan A is not working, will the minister finally tell us what plan B is?

[English]

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all reasonable people agree that the Canadian Forces require a fighter fleet to face the challenges of the 21st century. The best plane and the only state-of-the-art stealth aircraft available to Canada to face the challenges of the next 30 years is the F-35 joint strike fighter.

Our plan is on track. We continue to monitor this investment closely through direct contact with Lockheed Martin and the F-35 joint project team. The Minister of National Defence and I will be in Halifax this weekend and will be meeting with the U.S. Secretary of Defense, Mr. Panetta.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the communications equipment does not work in the north, pilots are not safe and costs are skyrocketing. Everyone is facing the facts and admitting that the F-35 program is not working—everyone except the Associate Minister of National Defence, who has buried his head in the sand.

How much longer will the Prime Minister allow his Associate Minister of National Defence to defend the indefensible? When will the Prime Minister himself launch an open, transparent and public bidding process?

[English]

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me repeat that our plan is on track. We continue to monitor this investment. We are working towards progress. The planes are coming off the production line. Pilots are flying them. They are being delivered to the joint strike fighter team.

Not only that, unlike the NDP travelling to the U.S. in an effort to kill and derail thousands of Canadian jobs, when we meet with U.S. authorities, it is to create Canadian jobs.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the only competition that has ever taken place for the F-35 has been between the Minister of National Defence and the Associate Minister of National Defence.

Yesterday, the Associate Minister of National Defence said there is no problem, no delays, but there is a plan B. Then Conservative officials told us there are many plans. Then moments later, the Minister of National Defence told us that in fact there are problems and long delays.

I have a simple question for whoever is in charge today. If the government has a plan B for replacing our fighter jets, what is it?

• (1435)

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all reasonable people agree that the Canadian Forces require fighter jets to do the job for the challenges of the 21st century. The best plane and the only state-of-the-art stealth aircraft available to Canada to face the challenges of the next 30 years is the F-35 joint strike fighter.

Our plan is on track. We continue to monitor this investment closely through direct contact with Lockheed Martin, as well as the U.S. authorities and the project team. There is no trading our commitment. There is no downgrading of the commitment. We are there. We are on track.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since we are trading literary recommendations today, I hear there is a new publication called "Buying Jets for Dummies". I recommend it to the Associate Minister of National Defence.

The Associate Minister of National Defence clearly said that there are no problems, but there is a plan B. The minister said there are problems, but there is no plan B. Americans and others understand that the F-35s are behind schedule and massively over budget. Perhaps the ministers could ask the U.S. secretary of defense about his plan B.

Here at home, New Democrats have a great plan B: put the file out to tender. Will they?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, maybe the hon. member could lend me his copy of the book.

In any event, I am not going to get into the rhetoric. I can guarantee that the plan is on track. We are sticking with the program. The planes are coming off the production line. They are being flown by pilots who know their business. I prefer to listen to them and to the experts rather than the idle chatter from the opposite side.

* * *

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this morning the Quebec public safety minister appeared in committee to prevent the government from scrapping the gun registry and destroying its data. What was the government's response? A deafening silence. Instead, he attacked the credibility of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police. We also learned that the Prime Minister refused to meet with the Dawson Student Union following the shooting in 2006.

Why is the government refusing to listen to the Government of Quebec, the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, and victims?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the answer is quite simple. Our Conservative government does not support treating law-abiding hunters, farmers and sport shooters as criminals. We have consistently opposed this wasteful and ineffective measure which does nothing to keep guns out of the hands of criminals.

Canadians gave our government a strong mandate to end the long gun registry once and for all, and that is exactly what we are doing.

Oral Questions

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since we are talking about books, I also have a book to recommend. It is called "Democracy for Dummies".

[Translation]

Not only is the government completely ignoring all appeals, but it is also preventing parliamentarians from doing our jobs by shutting down debate in committee—and not just any committee, the justice committee. Could anything be more undemocratic?

Canadians have already paid for the data—extremely useful data—in the firearms registry and, rightly so, the provinces would like to have that data back.

Will this government finally stop mocking our democracy and give Canadians back the data that belong to them?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism), CPC): Mr. Speaker, public policy must be judged by its real effects on the ground, and not by its intentions. When it comes to real effects, the part of the firearms registry dealing with long guns has never in any way helped prevent crime in Canada. Furthermore, regarding the data, I would like to remind my colleague what the Auditor General said on September 26, 2006:

We found the information in the database to have significant quality problems:

...

Verification frequently determined that information on the weapon's action, make or serial number was wrong.

* * *

• (1440)

[English]

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first the government robbed wheat farmers of their right to vote. Now we know the minister is taking wheat farmers' money to fund his folly.

In an 11th-hour act of desperation, the government has increased the cap on the Wheat Board's contingency fund from \$60 million to \$200 million to fund its own ideological obsession with killing the single desk. That is money that should rightfully be returned to farmers.

When did the government get into highway robbery and when will the minister do the right thing and give farmers back their hard-earned money?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course, this contingency fund has always been held separately from farmers' pool accounts. As a government, we took this prudent measure to protect the future of western Canadian farmers, Canadian taxpayers and, of course, the new voluntary Wheat Board.

Mr. Oberg continues to waste millions of dollars of farmers' money on his own personal political agenda. Since it is unclear what additional liabilities he will leave behind with his scorched earth policy, we have taken this prudent step.

Oral Questions

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is nothing prudent about what the government is doing. Elected farm directors are abiding by their oath of office. It is too bad the minister could not do the same. The minister knows the contingency fund is a result of the current board's management and comes from farmers' grain sales. His increasing the fund by executive order is an admission of greater risk under his government board. However, to expropriate millions of dollars of farmers' money is akin to theft.

How can the minister justify taking farmers' money to run his government-controlled grain company?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am disappointed, like western Canadian farmers. I thought, since the member for Malpeque grew that third eyebrow, he would see clearly the need for freedom in marketing for western Canadian farmers. We are going to hold that money in trust for western Canadian farmers for the new voluntary Wheat Board and ensure they have a chance at a vibrant future.

[Translation]

AIR TRANSPORTATION

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons misled Parliament when he said that the government used the Challenger jets only 24 or 25 times a year.

In reality, the government has used those planes no less than 71 times a year. Will the government House leader apologize?

[English]

Or, does he want to borrow a book that I just acquired called flying Challenger jets for dummies?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will concede that, when it comes to flying Challenger jets, we have a lot to learn from a former Liberal cabinet minister. When we compare our record with the Liberal record, there is no comparison. The Liberals have us beaten by 100,000 kilometres, I bet, if not far more. They were in the air all the time. It is a hard thing to come down to earth like they have. However, when it comes to the use of Challenger jets, it is lower under our government than it has been under any other government in years.

[Translation]

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today we have more evidence that this government has no credible plan to help small business and that the so-called plans they have, such as the Canada small business financing program, are working poorly, if at all.

It is outrageous that Industry Canada had no comment to make on allegations that funds have been diverted from the program. The minister absolutely must fix this program to ensure that it can fulfill its role and truly help small businesses.

Can the minister tell us today how much money Industry Canada has lost in this program by paying down loans for businesses that declared bankruptcy because they did not receive any really effective help?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism), CPC): Mr. Speaker, as far as help for businesses and entrepreneurs is concerned, I am very proud of this government's record. We have reduced the tax rate to 11% for small businesses and, effective January 1, 2012, to 15% for all businesses in Canada. That is a realistic record. It is a concrete record that is important for small businesses. As far as any potential fraud is concerned, I encourage people who witness illegal acts or fraud to file complaints with the appropriate authorities. It is a serious matter. Taxpayers' money is at stake.

[English]

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian small business financing program has failed to help the companies it was supposed to support. Now we are seeing fraud in the government's program. It is not the first time the government has dropped the ball in these matters. Consumers and small businesses are still getting gouged because the government refuses to cut merchant fees for credit cards.

Why has the government abandoned Canadian workers and small businesses?

• (1445)

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to be very clear in what I said in French.

All Canadians, who know something about that or who are witnesses on some front, must declare that to the authorities because it is important. It is taxpayer money and we take that very seriously.

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week, the Minister of Agriculture accused the elected Wheat Board members of stealing farmers' money. However, now we know the truth. The minister is planning to keep \$200 million of farmers' hard-earned money, a \$200 million grain tax. Not only is the government hauling out the single desk, it is picking farmers' pockets in the process. This is farmers' money, not the governments.

When will the minister give it back?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what western Canadian farmers are looking for is an opportunity to market their own grain, durum and barley, and we will give them that opportunity.

The contingency fund is there. The Wheat Board has used it at times, like a slush fund. We want to ensure that Mr. Oberg's sticky little fingers stay out of that, as they have been dipping into the pool accounts on farmers, spending tens of millions of dollars buying boats, spending like drunken sailors.

We will not allow that to happen. We will hold that contingency fund and help western farmers use that money in their own best interests.

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the farmers he intends to give it back to are the ones who are actually leaving and do not get it.

It is really simple. The government promised to allow Wheat Board farmers a vote and it broke that promise. Now the government is imposing a \$200 million grain tax on western farmers.

Last week, the government agreed to join the trans-Pacific partnership but will not tell Canadians if supply management is on the table.

The government sold out western farmers. Will it do the same thing to supply managed farmers across this country as it did to western farmers this week?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government respects the hard-working families who work on our dairy and poultry farms and who gather eggs every day so we can have them for breakfast. They respect that in us. We have been there for them when they need us.

We have a tremendous working relationship with the supply managed sector. We had it in our campaign platform. Those members did not. We put it in the throne speech. They voted against it. Who do members suppose supply managed farmers support? It is this side of the House.

* * *

PENSIONS

Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government's top priority is the economy and jobs. We are working for Canadians to support economic certainty and financial security.

I know the Minister of State for Finance has been travelling across Canada talking to our provincial partners, small business and others about improving our retirement income system.

Could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance update Parliament on our government's legislation for a pooled registered retirement pension plan?

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this summer, the Minister of State for Finance travelled to every province and territory to talk about the pooled registered pension plan. We wanted to improve retirement savings for Canadians, especially workers in small business and the self-employed, which is why we introduced legislation on the pooled registered pension plan today. This great, low cost savings option will help future retirees build their retirement nest eggs.

Oral Questions

I hope all parliamentarians will support this very good measure. I hope the NDP abandons its plans to convince other countries to terminate jobs here in Canada.

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PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY TO THE PRIME MINISTER

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the question is whether or not the government will ignore the warning from the senior parliamentary law clerk that the behaviour of the member for Peterborough at the ethics committee is both illegal and undermines the independence of the court.

Instead of giving an answer, the Minister of Canadian Heritage has been giving us a smoke and mirrors show, ranting about shotguns, the Wheat Board and the state of the beleaguered Canadian taxpayer.

However, a question remains. In the government's attack on the CBC, is it willing to undermine the independence of the Canadian courts?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, all the member for Peterborough is doing is what parliamentary committees are supposed to do.

Earlier this year, the previous Speaker of the House, Peter Milliken, said that parliamentary committees can ask for whatever documents those parliamentary committees want.

The member for Peterborough is simply asking that the CBC be accountable for the taxpayers' money that it receives. That is not an attack on the CBC. That is a mandate that the member for Peterborough received from his voters to come to Ottawa and ask for accountability. He is doing his job.

Why is the NDP standing against accountability and against responsible spending at the CBC?

• (1450)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if this were about accountability to taxpayers, the Conservatives would have given the member for Peterborough the job of cramping the style of the high-flying Muskoka minister who blew through \$50 million, cannot remember how it was done, had absolutely no receipts but assures us that every Tory in Muskoka had a good time.

Accountability is about respecting the divisions of the Constitution. That was the question that was put to the parliamentary clerk.

The question remains: Is he flying solo or is this part of a larger government plan to undermine the independence of our Canadian courts?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I see my hon. colleague has his tinfoil conspiracy hat firmly on today.

All the member for Peterborough is doing is asking for accountability. CBC receives a lot of money from taxpayers and taxpayers want to know how the money is being spent. It is very simple and very straightforward.

Oral Questions

With regard to parliamentary committees, they can ask for any document they want or any witness they want to come before committees to fulfill that mandate.

The member for Peterborough is standing up for taxpayers and the member for Timmins—James Bay is standing in his way. Why is he fighting against the interests of taxpayers? That is the question that should be answered. Why is he against taxpayers' interests?

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this government really has a strange way of doing things. On the one hand it lets one member do whatever he wants and request documents that are the subject of an ongoing court battle. That undermines the separation of powers between the legislative and judicial branches. What is more, the parliamentary law clerk deemed that this was unlawful. On the other hand, the President of the Treasury Board said, "oh, sure", promising to hand over handwritten documents that he himself used to authorize \$50 million in spending for gazebos in his riding. We are still waiting for those documents.

Will he hand them over today?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, by attacking the member for Peterborough, what the NDP is doing is showing that it has no regard for the accountability of the CBC or other organizations. It has no regard for the needs of taxpayers across the country. The member for Peterborough is doing his job. It is as simple as that.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am sad to see that the President of the Treasury Board has a new spokesperson today. So that he fully understands the question I just asked, I will try to be as simple and clear as possible. Canadians have a right to know exactly how that money was distributed in Parry Sound—Muskoka. The member for Parry Sound—Muskoka has 242 forms sitting in drawers in his constituency office in Huntsville. Twice, he told everyone that he would hand them over.

Will he keep his word and finally hand over these documents?

[English]

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what an astonishing double standard by the NDP.

The President of the Treasury Board and the former minister of infrastructure appeared before a parliamentary committee and testified with regard to this matter.

All the member for Peterborough is doing is saying that the CBC should be accountable before committee.

All we are saying is that the CBC should be elevated to the same level of accountability and responsibility as the President of the Treasury Board has already demonstrated.

The NDP demanded accountability from the President of the Treasury Board and he answered the call. All we are doing is asking for accountability from the CBC. It is pretty straightforward.

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in September, I wrote to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development to outline the Liberal position on any Conservative legislation on first nations water. There can be no bill without meaningful consultation and no bill without adequate and sufficient resources.

Will the minister commit today to these basic principles advocated by first nations and parliamentary committees, as well as the government's own expert panel on safe drinking water?

When will 100% of first nations have access to safe drinking water and the capacity to maintain them?

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in regard to the Liberal motion today and the whole question of first nations water and waste water, we do intend to introduce legislation this year on water and waste water.

This is a recommendation that has come forward from Senate committees, the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development and every other expert who has looked at this whole question of providing appropriate water and waste water on reserve. That is what—

• (1455)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the United Nations declared that access to clean water was a basic human right. For the community of Red Sucker Lake to access water, it is quite the challenge. Unlike most Canadians, people do not go to the kitchen and turn on the water. It involves pails and leaving the house. These types of conditions are unacceptable. We need strong federal leadership on this issue.

Does the government actually have a plan, a strategic timeframe, that would ensure that quality water is—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has been taking action to improve first nations communities' access to safe drinking water and reliable waste water. We had a national first nations water action plan.

The Liberals have no credibility on this issue. We inherited a mess after 13 years of Liberal government. We have invested \$2.5 billion since 2006 in first nations water and infrastructure. We have done a national assessment. We know where our focus and priorities should be.

[Translation]

THE ECONOMY

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, another Canadian winter will soon begin and families are already wondering how they will survive. With heating costs continuing to soar, too many families will have to choose between keeping warm and having food to eat. This is not a choice that Canadian families should have to make.

Why is this government not listening to the New Democrats and removing the federal tax on home heating? Why does it not give families a break this winter?

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, the NDP is talking about jobs and the economy, and asking how we can help families when they have bills to pay. I will say it once again: we must ask the New Democrats why they continue to go to Washington and elsewhere to eliminate jobs. It is through these jobs that Canadian families will be able to pay their bills. One has to wonder why the NDP is always trying to eliminate jobs in Canada that would help families to pay for everything they need in this world today.

[English]

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that answer will not help families heat their homes. Even the government's Conservative cousins in Ontario know that listening to New Democrats is the right thing to do. They agree with taking the sales tax off home heating, but the out-of-touch government does not get it. Canada gets cold; heating one's home is not a luxury.

When will the government get onside with its Conservative cousins and work with New Democrats to give families a break?

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to remind the House about the 120 taxes that were cut so that Canadians could keep more money in their pockets to pay for all of these things. There are \$3,000 more in the hands of Canadians today thanks to this government. Every single time we put a measure forward, the NDP voted against it.

Let us think about those jobs that the NDP is trying to kill. There are hundreds of thousands of jobs in the oil sands and the NDP is trying to kill those jobs. These are jobs that families need to pay for home heating. Let us not forget the GST. Who voted against that? The NDP.

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ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Winnipeg South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after years of Liberal inaction on first nations water and waste water, the NDP consistently voted against critical investments in first nations communities. The opposition is finally taking notice of this important issue.

Can the minister update the House on what action our government has taken since coming to office?

Oral Questions

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, finally a sensible question.

Our government is committed to taking action to improve first nations communities' access to safe drinking water and reliable waste water treatment facilities. We have invested \$2.5 billion since 2006.

I am proud to announce today that in addition to those ongoing commitments, we are also providing an additional \$5.5 million to support infrastructure improvements in Manitoba's Island Lake community. In fact, my officials will be meeting with the Island Lake first nations tomorrow. We are getting—

• (1500)

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. member for Bonaville—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor.

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CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonaville—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, I noticed the member for Mississauga East—Cooksville, during the presentation of petitions, put in a petition to completely cut off CBC/Radio-Canada. What was astonishing was that sitting next to him was the member for Calgary West, gleefully applauding the fact that the Conservatives are going to eliminate CBC/Radio-Canada.

My question is for the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages. He talks tough to us about how he wants to support the CBC, but it is not us he has to talk to, it is the people behind him. They are the problem.

This is a simple question. The member for Calgary West—

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages has the floor.

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, God forbid Canadians sign a petition.

If my colleague wants me to adopt the Liberal position on the CBC, that radical right-wing paper, the *Toronto Star*, said that the CBC was treated shabbily by the Liberal government, downsized, underfunded, abandoned. Another newspaper said that the Liberal policy toward the CBC was to gut it, kick it in the teeth and leave it hanging by a thread.

That is the Liberals' policy. They cut the CBC by \$400 million. If the member's position is that we should adopt the Liberal position, maybe he should put a petition forward on that.

The Speaker: Order, please. There is far too much noise. The chair is having an increasingly difficult time hearing both the question and the answer.

The hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona has the floor. We will have a little bit of order.

*Oral Questions***ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS**

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when is an advocate for aboriginal children considered an enemy of the state? Apparently, when she files a human rights complaint about wilful underfunding of welfare services for first nations children.

That is all that Cindy Blackstock of Canada's First Nation Child and Family Caring Society did. Since that day, more than 19 justice and other federal officials have accessed, inappropriately, her status Indian file and personal information.

Why is the government spying on Cindy Blackstock?

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we take Canadians' privacy very seriously. I have asked my deputy minister to report on whether privacy rules were respected in this case.

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SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has invested more in science and technology than any other Canadian government in history. We are pleased that Canada leads the G7 for our support of higher education, research and development. The reputation of our government is unmatched.

Can the Minister of State for Science and Technology and the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario please update the House on what our government is doing to ensure that Canada's research reputation is protected?

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can certainly do that. I am happy to announce today that our government is taking an important step to further protect Canada's reputation as a world leader in research and development.

Effective today, all research funding applicants through the NSERC, SSHRC or the CIHR will be asked to waive the right not to be named if they commit a serious breach of agency policy.

While misconduct in research is very rare, it is important to make sure the integrity of Canadian research and Canadian researchers is protected and we are doing just that.

* * *

[Translation]

TRANSPORT CANADA

Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the municipality of Neuville was forced to accept the construction of an airport in its community even though the municipal council and the residents are opposed to this project. The Canada Transportation Act is out of touch with reality in municipalities like Neuville. Developers can locate anywhere they want, without consulting the municipalities, if Transport Canada gives them the authorization to do so.

Will the minister commit to meeting with the mayor of Neuville and all the other mayors who have concerns about this law?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the hon. member that, in Quebec, mayors fall under the jurisdiction of the Quebec ministry of municipal affairs, regions and land occupancy. We have always been in the habit of respecting the jurisdictions of each sector. I am happy to speak to the minister, Laurent Lessard. He would be happy to speak to the mayors of all the regions of Quebec who are under his responsibility. With regard to transportation safety as it relates to airports, Transport Canada's main role is to ensure the security of airports and the safety of all travellers. We will continue to do this.

* * *

• (1505)

GUN REGISTRY

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Quebec could not make it more clear: if the Conservatives are bent on dismantling the gun registry, they must give Quebec the data so that it can maintain this tool that saves lives. Quebec's public safety minister, Robert Dutil, even came to Ottawa to remind the government that Quebecers helped pay for the registry and they are entitled to the data.

Now that the Conservatives can no longer hide behind the false pretense of protecting personal information, will they allow Quebec to retrieve the data from the registry it paid for, yes or no?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism), CPC): Mr. Speaker, during the election campaign we promised to destroy the gun registry. Guess what? The registry is made up of data, information. That is all there is to destroy. I do not know what else my colleague would like us to destroy. We will destroy what we promised to destroy because the data is wrong. The Auditor General said so on September 26, 2006.

In closing, I will quote the Auditor General:

Verification frequently determined that information on the weapon's action, make or serial number was wrong.

We will be destroying information that is wrong.

* * *

[English]

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of two ministers from Alberta, the honourable Cal Dallas, Minister of Intergovernmental, International and Aboriginal Relations, and the honourable Diana McQueen, Minister of Environment and Energy.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: I would also like to draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of the honourable Craig Leonard, Minister of Energy for New Brunswick.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of Dr. Gordon McBean, the internationally recognized meteorologist and climate change expert, recipient of the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize, and president-elect of the International Council for Science.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: I would also like to draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of Commissioner Brian Peddle, territorial commander for Canada and Bermuda of the Salvation Army.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

* * *

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier-Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to ask, for the first time as deputy House leader of the official opposition, the usual Thursday question.

To start, I would like to point out that, according to the second edition of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, the weekly statement is not supposed to serve as an opportunity to engage in negotiations or debate.

That is unfortunate, because just yesterday, the government saw fit to shut down debate on another bill, Bill C-13. I would very much have liked to remedy that situation by having a debate here in this House on the government's repeated undemocratic actions. However, I hesitate to do so because I do not want to be reprimanded by the Chair. So I will limit myself to saying that I believe that Canadians expect elected officials to debate the legislation before them and not to engage in procedural games.

[English]

Could the government House leader tell us and all Canadians what bills he is planning to subject to time allocation next week, other than the 644 pages of Bill C-13, and when the House will have its next supply day? Given the pattern of opposition days up to now, I think we can expect the next supply day on Thursday of next week, but please correct me if the government is changing its pattern for any reason.

• (1510)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we have said before, our government's top priority is the economy. Despite global economic challenges, nearly 600,000 new jobs have been created in Canada, 90% of them full-time. Through Canada's economic action plan our government has put forward focused and effective policies that have promoted job creation and economic growth in all sectors of the economy. That has been reflected in this week's successful jobs and economic growth week.

Our government will continue to focus on delivering important measures for Canada's economy. Thus, next week we will be delivering results on jobs week, and anticipate passing the next phase of our low tax plan for jobs and growth next week.

Business of the House

Beginning tomorrow, we will move forward on report stage for Bill C-18, Marketing Freedom for Grain Farmers Act. This important bill provides economic choice to western Canadian farmers. I understand that the hon. member for Winnipeg Centre has a number of amendments on the notice paper, but keep in mind that getting this bill passed would give farmers predictability for next year's growing season, which is an objective. I am looking forward to a productive, efficient and civil debate on the legislation, which will finally deliver freedom to western Canadian grain farmers after seven decades.

[Translation]

We will continue debate on Bill C-18 next Wednesday. I am hoping that we will be debating the bill's third reading on Wednesday, if the debate tomorrow turns out to be productive and efficient. In the last election, we committed to moving forward with Canada's economic action plan, a low tax plan for jobs and growth. Canadians gave our Conservative government a majority mandate to implement our plan.

On Monday, we will have the final day of debate on Bill C-13, the Keeping Canada's Economy and Jobs Growing Act, our primary bill in job creation and economic prosperity week. Bill C-13 implements important measures from our budget such as the small business tax credit and the extension of the accelerated capital cost allowance to make our manufacturers more competitive.

On Tuesday morning, we will continue debate on Bill C-7, the Senate Reform Act. The bill has already been debated on three days, so I hope that following Tuesday's debate the opposition will allow members to vote on this bill that will allow the Senate to reach its full potential as an accountable and democratic institution.

[English]

On Tuesday afternoon, we will continue debate on the opposition's motion to block Bill C-11, the copyright modernization act. The bill is another of our priority economic bills that the opposition is trying to prevent coming to a vote through what it calls a reasoned amendment.

Bill C-11 would create modern copyright laws to protect and create jobs, promote innovation, and attract new investment to Canada. This will be the fourth day that the bill has been debated. The time has come for members to have the chance to vote on this important economic bill. However, if the opposition continues in its efforts to delay and block the bill, we will again debate it on Thursday.

As is always the case, we will give priority to other important bills that may be reported back by committees. I refer especially to Bill C-10, as I understand that the justice and human rights committee is working hard, even as we speak, to complete its clause-by-clause consideration of the bill later today, I hope.

Speaker's Ruling

[Translation]

Finally, the next allotted day will be on Friday, November 25.

* * *

[English]

POINTS OF ORDER

TABLING OF DOCUMENT BY PRESIDENT OF THE TREASURY BOARD—
SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now ready to rule on the point of order raised by the member for Malpeque, on November 4, concerning the tabling of a document by the President of the Treasury Board.

I would like to thank the member for Malpeque for raising this matter, as well as the hon. Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, and the members for Richmond—Arthabaska and Winnipeg North for their comments.

[Translation]

The facts of this case are as follows. During oral questions on Friday, November 4, 2011, questions were posed which made reference to the resignation of a member of the Auditor General's internal audit committee in protest over the appointment of the new Auditor General. In one of these questions, the member for Bourassa named the individual concerned. Then, after question period, the President of the Treasury Board tabled a document that detailed a political donation this individual had made, referring to him by name twice.

[English]

In raising this point of order, the member for Malpeque condemned the minister's action, claiming that:

It is fear and intimidation. It can put the chill of fear into public servants and individuals in Canada donating to a political party that a minister will use that against them. By implication, it can be damaging to a person's reputation.

In response, the Chief Government Whip pointed out that since the document contained publicly available information, no confidentiality had been breached and no offence committed.

Before dealing with the substance of the point of order raised by the member for Malpeque, I would remind the House that ministers enjoy considerable latitude and may, at their discretion, table a wide range of documents in the House.

Standing Order 32(2) states:

• (1515)

[Translation]

A Minister of the Crown, or a Parliamentary Secretary acting on behalf of a Minister, may, in his or her place in the House, state that he or she proposes to lay upon the Table of the House, any report or other paper dealing with a matter coming within the administrative responsibilities of the government, and, thereupon, the same shall be deemed for all purposes to have been laid before the House.

[English]

Accordingly, it is clear that the President of the Treasury Board was acting within the established rules of the House in tabling a document for the information of members.

However, the information in the document tabled by the President of the Treasury Board, though publicly available, remains informa-

tion about an individual in his capacity as a private citizen. Therefore, the Chair would like to take this opportunity to remind all members of what my predecessors had to say on similar matters.

[Translation]

As Speaker Fraser outlined in a ruling on May 5, 1987, the freedom of speech members of the House enjoy is an "awesome and far-reaching privilege", one that allows our "parliamentary system to operate free of any hindrance". But he added, at page 5766 of the *Debates*, that:

[English]

Such a privilege confers grave responsibilities on those who are protected by it. By that I mean specifically the Hon. Members of this place.... All Hon. members are conscious of the care they must exercise in availing themselves of their absolute privilege of freedom of speech. That is why there are long-standing practices and traditions observed in this House to counter the potential for abuse.

[Translation]

This same caution is taken up in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, Second Edition, at page 616, which states:

Members are discouraged from referring by name to persons who are not Members of Parliament and who do not enjoy parliamentary immunity, except in extraordinary circumstances when the national interest calls for this.

[English]

Cognizant of this fundamental principle and having acknowledged that there is no rule that prohibits mentioning individuals by name in the House, my predecessors have warned members of the potential risks of referring to members of the public in the House.

On April 24, 2007, on pages 85 and 86 of *Debates*, Speaker Milliken said:

It is incumbent upon all members to exercise fairness with respect to those who are not in a position to defend themselves. That being said, the Chair finds no grounds for further action in the present case.

On May 26, 1987, at page 6375 of *Debates*, Speaker Fraser went even further, stating:

It is not simply that such people could be slandered, with impunity, without any redress available to them, but that wrongdoing may be implied simply by making a personal reference.

On the same occasion he reminded the House of the immediacy with which remarks are widely communicated, stating:

[Translation]

...We are living in a day when anything said in this place is said right across the country and that is why I have said before and why I say again that care ought to be exercised, keeping in mind that the great privilege we do have ought not to be abused.

[English]

I need not elaborate on the fact that what was true in 1987 is even truer today.

It is these wise cautionary remarks that have prompted me to use this occasion to remind all hon. members to use great care when referring to or singling out an individual who does not have a voice here in this House and to avoid circumstances when, by such reference, an individual could have his or her reputation damaged without having the opportunity to respond.

I thank all hon. members for their attention.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

The House resumed consideration of the motion, and of the amendment.

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in my place to address this important matter.

Before I go too far with what I have to say, I believe my hon. colleague's motion bears repeating. The hon. member for Toronto Centre moved:

That the House call on the Government of Canada to address on an urgent basis the needs of those First Nations communities whose members have no access to clean, running water in their homes; that action to address this disparity begin no later than spring 2012; and that the House further recognize that the absence of this basic requirement represents a continuing affront to our sense of justice and fairness as Canadians.

I thank the hon. member for putting forth this motion and raising this vitally important matter. Our government is strongly committed to the health and safety of all Canadians, whether they live on reserves or off, whether they are aboriginal or not. This remains a priority for all of us in the House.

I also want to inform all hon. members that I support this motion. That should come as no surprise to anyone. Like my hon. friend from Toronto Centre, I, too, believe the government needs to help ensure that all first nations communities have access to safe, clean and reliable drinking water. I, too, believe action should continue to be taken to ensure this kind of access. I, too, believe that the absence of safe, clean and reliable drinking water in first nations communities must be addressed.

Thankfully, our government recognizes the scope of the challenge raised in the motion. In fact, when the government assumed office five years ago, we made access to drinking water in first nations communities a national priority.

Since 2006, our government has made important and strategic infrastructure investments to support first nations in operating their water and waste water systems. We also launched a five-point plan of action for drinking water in first nations communities. In fact, our first budget contained important investments to start delivering concrete results from our plan. Moreover, by March 31, 2010, our government has invested approximately \$1.25 billion in first nations water and waste water infrastructure. That investment will total approximately \$2.5 billion by the end of the 2012-13 fiscal year.

Clearly, this is a government that is taking action, yet the job is not done. We continue to work with willing partners to find and implement concrete solutions to support access to safe drinking water. Our approach continues to be twofold. First, it involves determining with first nations the exact long-term infrastructure developments needed for each first nations community. Second, it involves putting in place an effective regulatory regime based on standards enshrined in law. This regulatory regime is meant to protect the integrity of our current and future infrastructure investments and safeguard access to safe drinking water in first nations communities.

Business of Supply

This approach is based on the findings of several key reports. Let me take a few minutes to share some valuable insights from those reports and how these reports are helping our government deliver results and continue to make progress on this important issue.

To determine the exact long-term infrastructure development needed for each first nations community, we carried out a detailed national assessment of existing public and private water and waste systems operated by first nations communities across the country. This was a comprehensive, independent, third party evaluation.

● (1520)

In fact, we are the first government to ever commission a national assessment of this kind. The size and scope of the assessment was unprecedented. More than 4,000 on-reserve water, waste water, well and septic systems were rated against an extensive set of criteria. The rating is based on the overall system management risk. It looks at whether system design or mechanical features are up to modern standards, for example, or if operators are fully certified.

The report gives us a more complete picture of the challenges and opportunities ahead. The national assessment will help first nations and our government focus efforts on priority areas. It will point to solutions. It will help ensure the most effective and efficient use of taxpayer dollars.

In addition, our government has developed a response plan to address the findings and recommendations of the national assessment. This response focuses on three key areas of action: first, improving technologies and partnerships to ensure the best use of investments in infrastructure; second, enhancing capacity building and training; and third, putting in place legal, enforceable federal standards and protocols.

The assessment is also the government's direct response to a recent report of the Auditor General, who called on the government to do more to monitor the quality of drinking water on reserves. The Auditor General also called for a regulatory regime for on reserve drinking water and waste water systems. The Office of the Auditor General is not the only institution to make this recommendation.

In 2006, the government put together a panel of experts to identify workable options for a regulatory regime for on-reserve drinking water and waste water systems. The panel gathered testimony from representatives of first nations, provinces and territories, along with various experts in water and engineering. In its report, the panel identified three feasible regulatory options. The most sensible option was federal incorporation by reference of provincial and territorial laws, with adaptations required to meet the needs of first nations communities.

Business of Supply

The Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development echoed the panel's calls. The commissioner also made a series of recommendations. The most important was the call to create a federally regulatory regime for drinking water on reserve. Indeed, the commissioner stated flatly that until a regulatory regime compatible with that in the provinces was in place, the federal government could not ensure that first nations people living on reserves would have continued access to safe drinking water.

The Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development was not alone. A 2007 report of the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples came to essentially the same conclusion. After hearing from dozens of witnesses, committee members stated bluntly in the report: "Legislation to regulate water standards on reserve is required. No one, including this committee, argues differently".

The Senate committee report went on to make another key recommendation. The committee called on the government to undertake a comprehensive consultation process with first nations communities and organizations regarding legislative options, with a view to collaboratively developing such legislation.

That is exactly what we did. In response to this recommendation, the Government of Canada initiated an ongoing consultation process. To be precise, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada published a discussion paper and distributed it to interested parties in advance of a series of focused engagement sessions. Nearly 700 participants, including more than 500 representatives of first nations communities, were given the opportunity to provide their comments and suggestions on the proposal made by the panel experts and endorsed by the government.

• (1525)

This option is to incorporate, by reference, existing provincial and territorial regulations, with adaptation to meet the needs of first nations communities. No other viable option was put forward.

It is that opinion which forms the foundation of Bill S-11, the safe drinking water for first nations act. Why the law? This government understands that standards on their own are not enough. Standards must be supported by the force of law.

As a result of the dissolution of Parliament on March 26, 2011, however, Bill S-11 died in committee. I am pleased to report that the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development has been dialoguing with first nations on this issue and will be introducing water regulations which will be designed to give the same protection to first nations that other Canadians have. This type of legislation would make it possible for our government to work with first nations communities to develop enforceable federal regulations, regulations that would address the provisions of safe drinking water, effective treatment of waste water and to protect sources of drinking water in first nations communities. Indeed, our government continues to make access to safe drinking water and effective waste water treatment on reserves a national priority.

As my hon. friend's motion attests, the challenge remains. On Tuesday, Ecojustice, a national charitable organization dedicated to ensuring Canadians can enjoy a healthy environment, publicized its recent report on water quality in Canada. The group's report noted

the absence of drinking water legislation for first nations communities. I can assure the people at Ecojustice and all Canadians that we recognize the clear need for rigorous standards to uphold the quality of drinking water in first nations communities.

Our government is committed to introducing a federal law regarding first nations drinking water as soon as possible. I can assure Canadians that we have and continue to make important and strategic investments to improve and maintain water and waste water systems in first nations communities.

Our government is committed to working with willing partners to ensure first nations communities have access to safe drinking water. We will continue to move forward with our first nations and other partners to make waste water and water systems solutions a reality.

• (1530)

Mr. Greg Rickford (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate this whole discussion today. We are pleased to see the opposition members turning their attention to an issue that we have been spending a lot of time and action on in the past five years. More contemporaneously, I appreciate the member who has been working hard with us on the aboriginal affairs committee.

I have a technical question for him about risk levels as he mentioned in his speech. We have been doing the hard work here with respect to understanding this fully and completely. What do risk levels actually mean? If a community's water system is rated as high risk, does that necessarily mean that water in the community is unsafe to drink? This would be the first in a series of technical questions, but could he start by answering that?

Mr. David Wilks: Mr. Speaker, there are different designations of risk. There is high, medium and low. The system risk scores are an overall risk assessment of the management risk and not a measure of current water quality. It is the risk that the system would fail to produce safe water in the event of a problem. In most cases, systems identified as high risk are providing safe water for communities. The identification of a system as "high risk" helps the department direct resources where they are needed most and is a tool used to prevent problems before they arise.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, as this is the first time I have risen to ask a question in the debate today, I want to thank the Liberal Party of Canada for putting forward this important resolution to focus our attention on first nations drinking water quality and I thank the hon. member for Kootenay—Columbia for his presentation on the issue.

Business of Supply

I think we are all of one mind in the House and I would like to take partisanship out of it. As long as I can remember, parliamentarians of all stripes have been talking about the scandal that first nations in this country do not have drinkable water. It is a federal responsibility and yet it seems to bedevil the solution.

I would like to ask the hon. member for Kootenay—Columbia, can he suggest how, with new legislation, we could deliver the results we want if we do not back it up with billions more dollars?

• (1535)

Mr. David Wilks: Mr. Speaker, it has been recognized in the past that we have thrown billions and billions of dollars at this problem. Without a standard of law being put in place, we will not be able to ensure this works well. When we put the regulation in place, it will also be a matter of law to ensure that all systems are run properly, legally, and within the letter of the law.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. member a question regarding Attawapiskat, a community on which I saw a short film, a documentary.

Where does the hon. member rank this community on the scale of how underserved it is in terms of drinking water?

[English]

Mr. David Wilks: Mr. Speaker, I do not have the list that ranks any of the first nations from 1 to 571. They have all been assessed and given priority by this government. They will all be looked at. I can assure the member that the first nations that he is speaking of will be looked at when the measures are put in place.

Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me pass on congratulations to my colleague, who I work with in committee, for a fine presentation.

I would ask my colleague to expand a little on the new report that is out and talk about what we have in terms of regulations concerning the water quality that must be adhered to, and how it will help pick up the pace in getting rid of major problems on reserves. Might he have a word or two on the new regulations for us?

Mr. David Wilks: Mr. Speaker, the regulations that will come into force will be equal to the provincial and territorial requirements in each of the said provinces and/or territories. By ensuring we have one collective system of regulation, we will ensure that we fall in line with the regulations of both the provinces and territories, and the federal government will ensure that occurs as well. It is very important that we have one standard that everyone understands is safe for all Canadians.

[Translation]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General's report on the living conditions in first nations communities says that, in the past five years, conditions have generally not improved and have even deteriorated. I am sure you are aware of this.

The deputy minister said that he had done everything he possibly could and that the government would have to give the department more tools if it wanted the department to do more. The hon. member

mentioned legislation on drinking water, which we are very happy about.

However, does the hon. member know whether the government intends to continue to introduce legislative tools to help the department?

[English]

Mr. David Wilks: Mr. Speaker, this government fully intends to continue down the road of ensuring that first nations have the best drinking water and waste water treatment centres available to them. We will work with first nations across Canada to ensure that occurs.

Mr. Greg Rickford: Mr. Speaker, just to move this discussion a bit further, whether we are talking about first nations or non-first nations communities, we have understood the importance of working on water treatment and waste water treatments. Obviously, the most important goal is residential, but there is also the commercial and industrial capacity. I know this member has been working hard on the committee around economic development.

I am wondering if he sees the economic development that we are looking at, specifically around land use modernization, or whether he sees that in part as a capacity exercise to ensure that first nations have the kind of infrastructure they will need to support a variety of activities, not just safe drinking water and waste water treatment.

• (1540)

Mr. David Wilks: Mr. Speaker, certainly we have heard from several people at committee with regard to economic development in first nations reserves. Speaking from the perspective of a former mayor in my community, I know the importance of waste water treatment plants. I know the cost of them. However, the fact of the matter is, to encourage business to come we must have good water and we must have good waste water treatment plants, specifically. If we do not have that business will not come.

Some first nations across this great land have recognized the importance of waste water systems and they are moving forward to ensure that they have the best that is available to them. I believe that if we can encourage that and continue to move that forward on all first nations reserves, we will have a great opportunity for all first nations to become economically sustainable within their first nations communities.

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I had the chance a couple of weeks ago to visit the Six Nations reserve near Brantford, Ontario and was astounded to learn that in southern Ontario, in a fairly built up urban landscape, there are 345 residences with no water whatsoever. They must truck water to their homes. This has been a problem for many years. There is already good drinking water on part of the reserve, so I am not sure what regulation is necessary to provide pipes.

Could the member explain to me, perhaps, how it is that the Government of Canada has neglected over many years the ability for these 350-odd residences to actually have drinking water in their homes?

Business of Supply

Mr. David Wilks: Mr. Speaker, we will ensure and work toward making sure those people at Six Nations get drinking water to those 325 homes that the member referred to. The infrastructure that is required to be placed into those homes has to be done through whatever means is required: putting pipes in the ground, ensuring they get to the homes, ensuring they are hooked up to the water system, and ensuring they are hooked up to the waste water system.

I am confident that this will occur very quickly. It is unfortunate that it has taken so long, but I can assure the House that our committee and the minister will ensure that it happens sooner than later.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, picture a black and white postcard of a toddler. His face is covered by a rash, his eyes are dark without shine, the headline is "Water is a human right" and the bottom caption reads "Do you have running water? I don't...and I live in Canada, I need your help".

This card is part of a campaign by the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs to raise awareness about the lack of safe and clean drinking water on many remote first nations reserves.

Now imagine walking down a path lined by trees to the lake on the Garden Hill First Nation. This is the walk a young boy must make every second day, just so he can break a hole in the ice to draw water for his family.

The former Auditor General Sheila Fraser reported that the government had failed time and again to take measures that would improve the quality of life for first nations. The basics of life, such as adequate housing, clean drinking water, child welfare, education, are persistently and dramatically substandard. As a result, Ms. Fraser said, in her parting words to Parliament:

I am profoundly disappointed to note...that despite federal action in response to our recommendations over the years, a disproportionate number of First Nations people still lack the most basic services that other Canadians take for granted...In a country as rich as Canada, this disparity is unacceptable.

She went on to explain that on first nations reserves conditions are getting worse instead of getting better, and recommended a complete overhaul of federal tools and increased participation of first nations.

Let me provide a specific example. The home of 82-year-old Mr. Taylor, who is a diabetic and requires dialysis every few days, has no bathroom and no running water. The hole in the ice is where he draws his water. The slop pail, a bucket covered by a garbage bag serves as his facilities in his upstairs bedroom. There is an outhouse, but it is inconvenient at minus 40°C.

Not being able to wash can have much more serious health consequences than diarrhea and skin infections. Lack of running water and therefore hand washing, a means of infection control is part of the reason northern Manitoba aboriginal communities were so badly impacted during the H1N1 pandemic.

Over the former Auditor General's 10-year term, her office produced 31 audit reports on aboriginal issues. Last year Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, itself, reported there was little or no progress in the well-being of first nations communities. A gap Ms. Fraser called unacceptable.

She explained that she actually thought it was quite tragic when there is a population in this country that does not have the sword of basic services that Canadians take for granted. Ms. Fraser concluded that too many first nations people still lack clean drinking water.

The federal government has jurisdiction over water on reserves, and provides support and funding to help these communities construct, upgrade and manage on reserve water systems.

Aside from federal policies, administrative guidelines and funding arrangements, there is no regulatory regime covering the quality and safety of drinking water in first nations communities, just as there is no legislation setting out responsibilities for educating children on reserves and no funding is assured.

Bill S-11, an act respecting the safety of drinking water on first nation lands was tabled in Parliament in May 2010, and attempted to address the regulatory void. Bill S-11 would have enabled the federal government to regulate drinking water on reserves, and incorporate and adapt relevant provincial legislation for the needs of first nations communities.

Bill S-11 was met with substantial resistance by first nations groups because it infringed on their jurisdiction. Furthermore, the 2010 Auditor General report warned that it could take years before regulations under Bill S-11 could be developed and fully implemented. The bill died when the federal election was called in the spring of 2011.

● (1545)

Water is essential for life. No living creature can survive without it. Water is a prerequisite for human health and well-being, as well as for the preservation of the environment. Water is the lifeblood of the land and of indigenous peoples who rely upon it.

First nations have, therefore, always viewed water as a sacred trust. From time immemorial, first nations have focused their existence on water; for example, their careful selection of community sites for transportation and harvest from waters. The amount of freshwater on earth is limited and its quality is under constant strain. Preserving the quality of freshwater is important for the drinking water supply, food production and recreational water use. Water quality can be compromised by infectious agents, radiological hazards and toxic chemicals.

Today, nearly two billion people live in water-stressed areas of the world and three billion have no water within a kilometre of their homes. Every eight seconds a child dies of water-borne disease, deaths that could be easily preventable with access to clean, safe water.

The lives of indigenous peoples are intricately tied to the land and the water. As those who live closest to the land and rely most heavily upon it, indigenous peoples strongly feel the effect of water depletion, pollution and other changes. Safe water supplies, hygienic sanitation and good water management are fundamental to global health. Safe water could annually prevent 1.4 million child deaths due to diarrhea, 860,000 child deaths due to malnutrition, 500,000 deaths due to malaria and 280,000 deaths due to drowning. Almost one-tenth of the global disease burden could be prevented by simply reducing risks of water-borne infectious diseases through increasing access to safe drinking water and improving sanitation, hygiene and water management.

There are many examples of water tragedies in Canada. For example, in 2000, seven people died in the community of Walkerton, Ontario, when their drinking water was contaminated with *E. coli*. However, it is aboriginal communities that have been disproportionately affected by the water crisis.

Despite repeated government pledges to ensure first nations have access to clean drinking water, their water is still often contaminated. The former auditor general, Sheila Fraser, reported that although the federal government had drafted legislation to ensure water safety, concrete changes were years away.

Most disturbing still is the fact that water quality testing is being undertaken only sporadically and key information is not being shared. More than half of reserves' drinking water systems are at risk. This past summer a national study of nearly 600 drinking water and waste water systems on first nations found that nearly three-quarters were classified at medium or high risk of not meeting safety standards. Specifically, over one-third were classified in the high-risk category.

The Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development said that the report was identifying risk and stressed that the findings did not mean water was unfit to drink. I do not want to take a plane that has a high risk of not touching down, just as I do not want to drink water that has a high risk of not meeting safety standards. Thirty per cent of the high risk was from either the source water or the design. The rest was all due to operation, monitoring and reporting. I, therefore, would ask what concrete actions the government has taken to increase training, monitoring and reporting, and what moneys have been made available to pay for these urgent activities.

The world is waking up to the water and sanitation crisis. The lack of access to clean water is one of the greatest human rights violations in the world. We have the millennium development goals, with an aim to reduce, by half by 2015, the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation. We are in the midst of the United Nations water for life decade, a decade of action to promote efforts to fulfill international commitments made on water and water-related issues by 2015.

• (1550)

When will the government address the water and sanitation crisis in our own country? Specifically, how will the government raise awareness about the water crisis? Action starts with awareness. How will the government undertake meaningful consultation on matters affecting first nations rights with respect to water and waste water?

Business of Supply

How will the government consult and work with first nations to address the resource gap? Will the government provide adequate financial resources to regions to conduct a thorough impact analysis to determine the financial, policy development and technical needs for each region?

In 2006, the expert panel on safe drinking water for first nations found that the federal government had never provided adequate funding to first nations to ensure that water quality standards on reserves could improve.

I want to make it very clear that our party will not support legislation on safe drinking water that is introduced without an implementation plan for additional resourcing that fully addresses the deficiencies identified in the national assessment of first nations water and waste water systems.

The government must collaborate with first nations and obtain their free, prior and informed consent on the range of regulatory options regarding safe drinking water identified by the expert panel on drinking water for first nations before the reintroduction of legislation.

The United Nations has recognized water and sanitation as a human right. On July 28, 2010, the United Nations General Assembly overwhelmingly agreed to a resolution declaring human right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation. The resolution had 122 countries vote in its favour, while 41 countries, including Canada, abstained.

At the very time of the resolution, more than 100 boil water advisories were in effect on reserves and, for another 49 first nations communities, boiling water did not make the water safe enough for consumption. As of July 2011, there were 126 first nations communities across Canada under a drinking water advisory, an increase from 106 communities in 2008. As of October 31, 2011, there were 124 first nations communities across Canada under a drinking water advisory.

The MKO grand chief, David Harper, clearly told a Senate committee in February 2011 that the lack of running water in more than 1,000 homes in northern Manitoba was a violation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. He explained that his people were living in third world conditions, that families in the Island Lake region of Manitoba had less water every day than people in refugee camps.

People in the Island Lake region survive on just 10 litres per day, usually carried by family members in pails from local water pipes. Additional water comes untreated from lakes and rivers that have tested positive for contamination, including *E. coli*.

Business of Supply

Just this week, Ecojustice confirmed earlier findings, namely, “although billions have been spent and new legislation has been proposed, water quality in first nations communities is still far below that of off reserve communities and it shows few signs of improving”. Specifically, Ecojustice issued a report card on water and its lowest mark was awarded to the federal government, in part for the local improvement in water quality in first nations communities.

Global assessments indicate that the annual cost of not addressing water and sanitation amounts to 1.8 million deaths, health care costs of \$7 billion U.S. to health institutions, \$340 million U.S. to individual households and an opportunity cost of time lost in illness and care of \$63 billion U.S.

● (1555)

For a number of decades, water and sanitation issues were considered synonymous with disease and poverty. Inadequate water supplies, unsafe water resources, poor water management and inequitable access translated into time loss, financial cost, a burden of disease and high health care costs.

Over the past 15 years, this thinking has considerably changed. Water and sanitation issues are now considered an engine for development. Universal access to improved water supply, safe water resources and water resource management all have the potential to contribute to time and financial savings, better health and averted disease costs, and economically productive populations.

As discussed earlier, infectious water-related diseases are a major cause of morbidity and mortality worldwide. It is important to remember that newly recognized pathogens and new strains of established pathogens are being discovered and present additional challenges to both the water and public health sectors. For example, between 1972 and 1999, 35 new agents of disease were discovered and many more have re-emerged. Some of these pathogens may be transmitted by water.

Canada should be aggressively pursuing new ways to protect public health by reducing contaminants in the drinking water for all Canadians by protecting drinking water resources, modernizing the tools available to communities to meet their clean water requirements and providing affordable clean water services in rural communities.

It is time for the Government of Canada to implement a comprehensive national water strategy that upgrades national drinking water standards. In April 2008, the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* reported that there were 1,766 boil water advisories currently in place in Canadian municipalities, not including first nations communities.

Of the roughly 90,000 houses on reserves in 2008, approximately 2,100 homes had no water service and 4,700 had no sewage service.

Advisories are intended to be a precautionary measure in the public health tool kit. However, given the fact that some have been in place for at least five years, they are apparently being used as a band-aid solution.

As part of a national strategy for water, the government might consider the urgent need for infrastructure investment, committed

federal funding for municipalities and first nations communities to upgrade public water utilities, protection and preservation of water for all forms of life and for future generations, and federal backstop legislation to keep water in its basins and effectively ban bulk water exports.

Clean water is one of life's most basic needs and, therefore, it is unthinkable that communities are told to manage without it. The fact that over 100 first nations communities cannot drink their water is a national disgrace. One chief asked, “I wonder how different the response would have been if the residents of Toronto were without access to water?”.

I will finish by asking whether hon. members worry about the safety of their drinking water.

It is time that everyone in this chamber joined with first nations in demanding accountability and the right to safe drinking water. Moreover, it is time that the federal government be held accountable for its poor water protection grade.

● (1600)

Hon. Lynne Yelich (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a correction to the member's statements about not having a strategy and not giving attention to water and waste water.

Between 2006-07 and 2012-13 the government allocated over \$2.5 billion in water and waste water infrastructure in first nations communities: through the economic action plan, \$187.7 million for water and waste water projects across Canada; with those funds in Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada invested in 23 water and waste water projects.

I could go on. I could go to the best-based funding. Every government currently invests approximately \$422 million annually to support ongoing projects such as roads, bridges, electrification, infrastructure in first nations communities and about \$290 million for on-reserve housing needs.

We have invested in education, in housing and also in economic development because the first nations have asked for the creation of an economy in which they can participate. Since 2006, our government has done a lot.

Has the member any record of what was done before 2006 to set the record straight, given that she goes on about how many years first nations communities have been in such dire straits? Our government has paid attention to that and has made huge investments.

Business of Supply

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, there was no need for a correction. This is about getting results.

While \$330 million in the 2008 budget was allocated to safe drinking water in First Nations communities over two years, the current government has backed away from the Kelowna Accord that dedicated \$5.1 billion to improving the socio-economic conditions and access to water for Aboriginal people. Although the Accord would not have closed the gap between the standard of living for First Nations and non-Aboriginals in Canada, it was a sign of progress. "The Kelowna Accord was not the whole solution, but it was an incredibly important first step in implementing a comprehensive plan that would lead to a lasting solution," said National Grand Chief Phil Fontaine in addressing the Senate Standing". It was reached in November 2005 by the Government of Canada, provincial Premiers and Aboriginal leaders. Committee on Aboriginal Peoples.

• (1605)

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. friend for her passion and compassion on this issue.

We can all point fingers and talk about what was done in the past and ask if we are doing enough right now, but in my riding of Sudbury, many times the Canadian Red Cross has come to support the folks from Kashechewan who have been evacuated. Too many times we have seen aboriginal people from the north come to our communities, being pulled from their homes because they cannot find water to drink. That is appalling in this day and age.

To address this issue is we need to stop finger-pointing. Let us get to work and end this, because there is no reason that people in Canada should go without drinking water.

Could the hon. member comment on that?

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is absolutely right, this is what today is about, that we bring attention and that we work to get 100% of people living on first nations reserves the water and waste water treatment the rest of Canada has.

Nursing stations in Island Lake offer baths to medically vulnerable people who have no running water at home.

The physicians say, "We complain to each other about how much time we spend on this stuff. We would like to spend more time on education, heart disease, diabetes prevention, maternal child issues, but we cannot, because we have to take care of what needs attention right now".

Being unable to wash can have much more serious health consequences than diarrhea and skin infections, as residents of St. Theresa Point discovered when H1N1 flu exploded in the spring of 2009. "Lack of access to water and overcrowding facilitated the spread of these viruses", a Health Canada media spokeswoman acknowledged.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanic—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. member for Etobicoke North a question that has not been put forward today.

Does she think that part of the problem is that we do not regulate safe drinking water for Canadians? All of our drinking water

standards are guidelines, so when the federal government fails to provide safe drinking water it is not breaking any law.

Similarly, when the Newfoundland government hid from Newfoundland and Labrador residents that trihalomethane, a cancer-causing substance, had contaminated local drinking water, it was not breaking any law.

Do we need to take a different look at the way Canada regulates drinking water overall, without taking anything away from the fact that the worst situation is in first nations communities?

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, it is time for the government to implement a comprehensive national water strategy as well as upgrade our national drinking water standards.

As part of that national water strategy, I see the urgent need for infrastructure investment, committed federal funding for municipalities and first nations communities to upgrade public water utilities, protection and preservation of water for all forms of life and future generations as well as federal backstop legislation to keep water in its basin and effectively ban bulk water exports.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to comment on the member for Etobicoke North's reference to the national assessment report on risk.

Two-thirds of the risks associated with first nations water facilities actually relate to their capacity and the challenges that first nations have in training qualified water plant operators.

Since 2006, the number of certified operators has increased from 375 to 775 in 2011. Therefore, rather than support the Liberal record of inaction, will the member not support the legal standards in place?

An hon. member: She doesn't have the answer.

• (1610)

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I am trying to understand what the question was actually. Because I found it difficult to follow, I will raise a health issue.

I will bring this back to what this discussion is supposed to be focused on and talk about baby Jacob. He is covered in crust and sores that look painful. The nurses are not certain what his skin condition is, eczema perhaps, but they have told his mom that the best way to help this child's skin heal is to keep him clean all the time.

This is a tall order. His mother has to haul water from one of the town's outdoor taps. She only has one pail. It is a 38 litre pail for five family members, which works out to about 8 litres of clean water per person each day in a community where everything is covered in a thick layer of mud from unpaved roads. That is half the amount of water the family would likely be given by international aid agencies if the situation were recognized as a health emergency.

Business of Supply

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I spent a day recently at a reserve in southern Ontario, which amazingly has for decades not had clean water for many of its residents. Those decades span federal governments of all stripes, except the NDP, yet there has been no pipes run. Somebody needs to run pipes and there is no action. Regulations will not fix it. Talking about it will not fix it.

I also discovered that my hon. colleague's riding is the subject of a land claim by these same people at the Six Nation. I do not know if she is aware of that.

Could she comment on the need, not for regulation and not for talk, to actually send somebody with bulldozers and pipes and put water in the ground.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, we were there a few weeks ago and I am very aware of the issue.

I work very closely with first nations. I will again stress the health issue here.

Ruth Wood is 64. She lugs a latrine pail up a hill to the outhouse to dump it because her husband is in a wheelchair after neck surgery and cannot walk to the privy. He worries that they will be forced out of their home when his wife can no longer handle the buckets.

In winter, Nicole Mason, who is 14, and her little brother Andy, who is 6, haul drinking water home in St. Theresa Point on a plastic sled through driving snow.

Bernard Flett can barely walk, so one of his daughters sometimes hauls two buckets at a time with a wooden yolk over her shoulders.

Today is about bringing everyone together to take action on a national crisis in the country.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with my colleague from Edmonton—Strathcona.

I stand here proud to represent the people of northern Manitoba, recognizing that we have incredible diversity in our part of the country and, with it, tremendous opportunity as well with the wealth of human resource in our region. We are also one of the youngest regions in Canada and northern Manitoba. Many young people looking ahead at what they hope will be a bright future are part of communities that are looking down the line to see how they can make our part of the country a better place in which to live.

However, along with our tremendous opportunity and that wealth of knowledge and incredible diversity, there are also some extreme challenges that people in northern Manitoba face. Perhaps the most acute of these challenges exists on some of the northern remote first nations that I have the honour to represent.

I would like to point particularly to the reality faced by the Island Lake region's four first nations, St. Theresa Point, Garden Hill, Wasagamack and Red Sucker Lake, communities that are quickly growing. Many of the people who live in these communities are young people looking ahead at a reality that is very different from the reality most Canadians realize. I would argue that reality, as more Canadians have come to know of it today, is one that shocks many people because it is so far from not just the kind of services

Canadians have, but the kind of daily actions that we expect any Canadian to go through.

The more than 40% of the 1,880 first nations homes in Canada that still do not have water service are located in these four Island Lake first nations. More than 800 homes in the Island Lake first nations are without water service. As many people in the House know, homes are often overcrowded, leaving multiple generations to live with the social turmoil that is involved with such a reality. What exacerbates that is the fact that so many of these houses do not have running water.

A couple of years ago, it was important for me to stand, along with people in the NDP, and call for urgent action when it came to the H1N1 pandemic that hit the Island Lake first nations disproportionately. Many people wonder why that was the case, but we know that the correlation between influenza, viruses and illnesses of all kinds and no running water is a very strong one. Instead of a long-term plan, the government focused the discussion around hand sanitizers. Even when we asked for a proper response when it came to medical professionals, the government took a long time to be there.

The story of the Island Lake first nations is one that is more extreme than others. The other communities I represent, such as Shamattawa, Hollow Water, Bloodvein and Marcel Colomb, which is working to build its first nation, also face extreme challenges in providing proper water services to their residents.

Simply put, the situation facing so many first nations in northern Manitoba and across Canada is unacceptable. First nations people across Canada face third-world living conditions, conditions that so many of us could not even imagine.

I think of the people I visited in communities across my constituency and communities in Island Lake, where I have the chance to drive on the ice roads to go and visit every year, if not more than once a year. I remember in the last election, following extreme pressure from both the media and the leadership in the first nations in Island Lake, the response given to them by the Ministry of Indian Affairs was a slop pail for every home. In fact, I took a picture with a slop pail and for many people it was a mix of shame, disgust and perhaps awe, trying to understand what the government meant to say on how little it thought of the reality faced by people in Island Lake.

Today, I am pleased to hear the government is supporting the motion in front of us and is committing to action. I am eager to know that this action is not around sending a new round of slop pails or water tubs, but that it looks at long-term investment in these communities.

• (1615)

I am also concerned that the reality today is not just one that has been developed over the last five years. Previous Liberal governments have committed to the unacceptable reality that so many first nations face in northern Manitoba, through the starving of capital funds to first nations due to the 2% cap, and through the refusal to understand that first nations people, under Liberal and current Conservative governments, deserve the dignity that we all deserve as Canadians.

Today, I am proud to stand with my colleagues in the NDP to call for a real action plan that supports the needs of first nations and changes this unacceptable reality that they face. I would like to call for a visionary approach, recognizing that it is not just about clean water, housing and education, but it is about understanding that first nations people in Canada fall well below their non-aboriginal counterparts when it comes to quality of life.

It shows a structural inability of government after government to deal with first nations people on an equal level, to recognize the self-governing capacity of first nations. We must work with them in partnership and recognize that, in the case of Manitoba and first nations across the country, we must respect their treaty rights. In doing so, we commit to changing that reality together. As first nations face third world conditions, it is something that all Canadians face.

We must recognize that making such change brings tremendous opportunity to our country. If first nations young people have proper housing conditions, water conditions and education, they will be able to contribute to Canadian society like anyone else. Our economy will benefit, our social fabric will benefit and we will all benefit.

As the member of Parliament for Churchill, I am asking on behalf of so many first nations and as a proud New Democrat, for us to put an end to the piecemeal approaches or the public relations stunts. We need to work with first nations who have worked very hard, whose leadership and community members and organizations have worked very hard to put the issues on the table and to bring solutions forward. These solutions are based on partnering with other jurisdictions, such as provincial governments and municipal actors, to discuss economic development. At the end of the day, though, the Government of Canada has a fiduciary obligation to first nations. The third world conditions that exist on first nations in Canada today are a shame to the Government of Canada and a shame to all of us.

I am asking today that we put aside the debates about who has done what. We are far off the mark in ensuring that first nations and aboriginal people in Canada have the same dignity that we all deserve, that we share with them in building a vision that looks at equality, fairness, dignity and a new way of thinking of the kind of Canada that we want: a Canada where we enjoy the equality, but recognize the rights of the first peoples of our country. No one in Canada today should live the reality that so many first nations experience and we all, as Canadians, first nations, Métis and Inuit deserve dignity in a Canada of 2011 and moving forward.

• (1620)

Mr. Greg Rickford (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Churchill and I share a vast border together and communities in her riding and mine are long-standing families. She and her father have done some work on this file and others for her communities. I have had an opportunity to be the nurse in charge at St. Theresa Point and nurse in Cross Lake and Norway House, a beautiful part of the country. There are certainly some challenges there.

Business of Supply

With respect to Island Lake, this government has taken immediate measures that resulted from meetings with department officials last year. Septic trucks, water trucks and other equipment were brought in over the winter roads and a plan was put in place to conduct an assessment on a house-to-house basis of community water and waste water needs.

In terms of her comments with respect to a piecemeal approach, that was an urgent intervention. Would she not agree that the three critical components to a good comprehensive plan would be capacity development, certifications to report, monitor and maintain those facilities, infrastructure needs, and legislation, and that this triumvirate forms the basis for a good strategy moving forward?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, I respect my colleague's work in the critical area of health care services in northern Manitoba and across northern Ontario.

I am encouraged to see the attention to dealing with the reality of so many first nations. However, many promises have been made. Recent promises to the Island Lake region resulted in people getting new slop pails and water containers. The parameters that we are setting in our policies are not translating to real change on the ground. That is why when I hear the minister committing to a plan, I know the Island Lake first nations and people across northern Manitoba are keen to see how this will make a tangible difference in ensuring that there is clean running water in their homes and communities.

• (1625)

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for her great work on this subject and the work she does for her constituents.

This is an issue for those of us who live in northern communities. I am from an urban centre in northern Ontario, but I see the effect among those who come from the northern communities into Sudbury when they have been evacuated because their drinking water supply has been contaminated by solid waste treatment. Money has been spent on evacuation, which is necessary. It is sad that we still live in a day and age when those who live in rural communities in the north, especially aboriginal communities, are going without water. It is a necessity of life.

I would like to hear what my hon. colleague has to say in relation to what we can do right now to ensure that we are addressing this catastrophe.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, I would like to note the work done by my colleague from Sudbury in ensuring that northern Canadians of all backgrounds have the kind of fairness that they deserve, whether it is in terms of health, education or the economy.

The point he made was about putting emphasis on right now, which is the critical piece. This is an urgent situation. We know the health impact as a result of the lack of clean running water. We know the tremendous social and even psychological impacts that people face while living in such undignified conditions. Let us ensure that the plan being put forward by the government echoes the plans that are being asked for by first nations.

Business of Supply

First nations have done extensive work. They have pointed to opportunities for partnerships and information that needs to be pursued. Let us listen to them, work in partnership with them and make sure that the third world living conditions that first nations experience today are no more.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Saint-Jean, The Economy; the hon. member for Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Canada Post; the hon. member for Cape Breton—Canso, The Environment.

[English]

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Churchill for sharing her time with me.

I support the motion by the hon. member for Toronto Centre but on condition, as was complied with and consented to, of a very critical amendment to that motion. The critical amendment calls for immediate action on an issue that has gone on far too long in this country. We are happy to support this motion subject to the amendment also passing that immediate, urgent action be taken to address the critical situation with respect to access to drinking water for our first nations people in Canada.

The dire situation faced by far too many aboriginal communities deserved urgent, substantial action and investment in decades past by former Conservative and Liberal governments. Today is an opportunity for every elected member in the House to support the call for immediate action and investment, and I emphasize action and investment.

First nations people grow tired of hearing the same response by the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs every day in the House, that the government is spending a lot of money. The government is spending a lot of money on a lot of things, but it is not addressing the urgent needs of first nations women, children, elders and families for potable water for safe washing and drinking. They deserve it now, not next week, not next month, not next year, not in the next decade.

National Chief Shawn Atleo testified on Bill S-11, the proposed safe drinking water act for first nations tabled by the government in the Senate, not in the House, during the last Parliament. That bill, by the way, was roundly spoken against by every first nation organization and leader who testified. We are still waiting for the long-promised revised and improved law to come forward.

Chief Atleo said that federal action to provide safe drinking water services to all first nations is a clear priority for the first nations he represents. It does not yet appear to be a priority for the Conservative government.

I want members to hear me clearly. It is not an adequate response if the measures, including promised but not yet forthcoming laws, taken are not based on direct consultation with first nations and accommodation of their stated needs, interests and recommendations.

Chief Atleo advised that three distinct and inseparable actions must be taken to ensure sustainable supply of safe drinking water to first nations communities. Those include first, clear assurance of the necessary resources to ensure that first nations can comply with any future drinking water standards. Second, a genuine process of consultation with first nations in the development of the rules is needed. Chief Atleo gave examples of where in the past there had been genuine and constructive dialogue on legislation. Regrettably he advised, that has not yet occurred in this matter.

His third action is the recognition that no first nation will agree to any law that abrogates or derogates aboriginal and treaty rights. That was the most strident objection voiced by all first nations witnesses testifying to the law put forward by the government in the last Parliament.

Those views were echoed at other forums sponsored by the federal government. The former Indian affairs department, now Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, appointed an expert panel on safe drinking water for first nations. Yet again another review, another study. It reported in 2006. It recommended exactly what Chief Atleo called for.

We need to provide legislative protections for first nations communities in the same way that those protections are accorded to all other communities in this country. How does that happen, because the government in its wisdom, like all past Liberal and Conservative governments, has refused to enact binding, legal, safe drinking water standards?

• (1630)

Therefore, when we deal with first nation peoples who are supposed to be protected by this national government, we see that the government has failed to provide those same standards to first nation peoples.

The expert panel recommended that yes, we need to have legislation provide a useful framework for that law and the number of options, but also said that the government must not move forward until it guarantees the resources and training are in place so those nations can comply with that law.

Then the Senate had yet another review before its aboriginal committee. In 2007, based on the testimony yet again by government and first nation leaders, it made exactly the same recommendations that were put forward by the national chief, and in fact by all the chiefs who had been testifying, and by the INAC expert panel.

Thus the duty to consult and accommodate is very important, and the first nations are calling upon the government to take that seriously. That duty was upheld by the supreme Court of Canada in a very important case brought by a first nation in my province, the Mikisew Cree First Nation. That decision was very clear: before the federal government makes any decision on any policy or law, or on any matter affecting the resources, interests or people of first nations, it has an overriding constitutional obligation to consult, accommodate and respond.

It is not good enough that the government keeps reminding first nations how much money it spent, or to be patient because safe drinking water laws are coming soon. It needs to genuinely commit the budget now.

In a moment, I will reveal what the budget number is. How do I know the number? It is because the government commissioned an engineering group to do the work of identifying that exact figure.

If the first nations suffering under continuing boiled water advisories cannot hold out hope that the government is going to respond to all of those previous reviews, they might heed the advice of the former Auditor General, Sheila Fraser. In her final audit report this year, she identified first nation drinking water as among the critical outstanding matters warranting priority federal action. She admitted that the government had taken some action, but decried the lack of any real progress in improving the lives and well-being of people living on reserves. She has said that despite her office producing over the past decade "...no fewer than 31 audit reports on aboriginal issues....too many First Nations people still lack what most other Canadians take for granted".

She called for major structural reforms, including a legislated base for programs, including safe drinking water, and "commensurate statutory funding". Those are very important words, "commensurate statutory funding".

What she pointed out with examples from education was that in the case of first nation children, they do not have a statutory right to ensure that governments issue money on a regular basis to meet their educational needs or, in this case, their safe drinking water needs. No. First of all, the first nation has to agree that it will build a treatment plant or build the piping or fix the piping or do some training. Then, on that condition, the government will eventually sign a contribution agreement and eventually the first nation will receive some money, but only for a year. Then it starts all over again.

She also called for support for local service delivery by first nations. Again, the Auditor General was listening to first nations. Will the government listen to the first nations?

Let us put a reality fix on the scale of the problem. As I mentioned, the engineering report commissioned by the government, issued this year, identified a cost of an additional \$3.5 billion simply to bring first nation water supplies up to standards legally required for other Canadian communities. It may be noted that for Alberta alone, the cost is \$162 million.

I want to add that it is not enough just to deal with the end of the pipe. As members may be aware, or those who were in the last Parliament or have taken the time to take a look at what occurred in the last Parliament, a number of us issued a report based on a review of the impact of the oil sands on water. In that report, it was very clear that the federal government was dropping its responsibilities on the protection of source water.

That is absolutely critical. The best way to reduce the costs for first nations of treating their water is to ensure that the source water is clean.

A few days ago, I mentioned the high levels of carbon in the source water of the Fort McKay community. If they had a safer

source of water, they could reduce the harm to their community by not having to add more chlorine to their water.

• (1635)

In closing, first nations deserve a law to ensure their right to safe drinking water, they deserve the resources to move on that immediately, they deserve respect for their aboriginal and treaty rights, and they deserve real consultation in this matter.

Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the issue of funding for safe drinking water has come up repeatedly in many speeches. However, numerous reports, including some by the previous Auditor General just cited by the member opposite, state that that there are not yet clear standards for accountabilities for investment, and that water infrastructure itself sometimes faces a shortened life cycle because these facilities are not governed by the sustainable infrastructure and the accountability that should go with sustainable infrastructure.

I will read what we take to be a reasonable statement by the member opposite: "The Auditor General is very clear. Throwing money at the problem is not enough. You need structural reform. Unlike the rest of Canadians who actually have laws providing us... safe drinking water, none of that exists for First Nations peoples, and they're calling for very reasonable recommendations to move on restructuring how these services give some legal certainty...."

That is a statement made in June by member for Edmonton—Strathcona. I would like to know if she stands by that statement today.

• (1640)

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I absolutely do. If the member took the time to read the full Auditor General's report, he would understand what she was talking about.

The Auditor General called for structural reform in government. Why did she call for that? It was so that the federal departments and officials could be held accountable by the first nations for the responsibilities they have to provide safe drinking water.

Absolutely, I stand by that. I have the highest respect for the former Auditor General, and she was bang on.

[Translation]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothé (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am sure that, like me, my colleague from Edmonton—Strathcona is insulted to hear the Conservatives say that they have done a lot of work since 2006, when the Auditor General's report is clear. There has been virtually no improvement in the past five years, and things have even gotten worse in some cases, for example with education and adequate housing.

Business of Supply

I would like my colleague to talk to us a bit about what the Auditor General's report said regarding the suggestions, which go beyond legislation.

[English]

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, indeed, the Auditor General's final report did go much further than just the need for the government to finally give due attention to safe drinking water for aboriginal communities. She also raised the plight of inequitable funding going to first nations children compared to other children.

One of the things I wish the hon. member for Toronto Centre would have referenced specifically when he tabled his motion is the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. That would have reminded every member of the House that the government of the day signed on and assented to that United Nations declaration. By doing so, it undertook to commit to remove immediately all discrimination against aboriginal peoples in Canada. That does not just fall within safe drinking water, but within housing, infrastructure and equal access to economic opportunities.

Mr. Greg Rickford (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member's speech today and the opportunity to work with her in committee on some important things.

The member is co-author of a book entitled, *A Legal Guide to Aboriginal Drinking Water*, which I have had a chance to review and concur with on many fronts. In this book, the member and her co-author assert that legally binding standards for safe drinking water for first nations communities are long overdue. She alludes to a piece of legislation that died on the order paper.

I wonder if the member is prepared to work with the government and first nations to fill the legal gap that she outlined in her book and whether she believes that those legally binding standards are a matter of the highest importance in this process.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I am glad that the hon. parliamentary secretary is reading the book. I was happy to give him a copy.

Indeed, I am looking forward to continuing to work with first nations and the government. That is why I ran for election originally and was elected in 2008. I have been waiting for the opportunity to work hand in glove with the government.

Unfortunately, the government has chosen, in its wisdom, to table the bill in the Senate, and so I have not been afforded that opportunity as yet. I am looking forward to the opportunity of recommending witnesses to come forward. I would bring to the member's attention that I appreciate the invitation from 47 chiefs in Alberta to meet with them urgently to review their concerns with the legislation the government previously tabled.

• (1645)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor. I want to take this moment to thank him, a member of another party, for quite magnanimously and

generously making it possible for the Green Party to enter into the debate on this important opposition day motion.

We are concerned, as are all parties in the House, about the ongoing scandal of the failure of the federal government to ensure our fiduciary, legal and constitutionally required obligation to provide safe, clean drinking water to every person living within a first nations community. This is so fundamental, so constitutionally enshrined and so clearly something that we all share on all sides of the House, it is not only our legal obligation but also our moral obligation.

It is an ongoing scandal that disturbs the conscience of all Canadians when they realize that third world drinking water conditions exist right across this great and wealthy country, but in first nations communities almost exclusively.

I want to try to address the problem and propose some solutions as we discuss this issue in as non-partisan a fashion as possible.

We recognize that the statistics on this issue are shameful. Only 27% of first nations enjoy drinking water that could be considered safe; 39% of drinking water supplies are judged to be of high risk; and 34% are judged to be of moderate risk. The first nations themselves have questioned these statistics collected by our Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, which says these are collected in a bit of an arbitrary fashion but are the statistics we have.

In one month alone, in May of this year, there were 223 advisories and warnings in first nations communities, a statistic discovered by Canadian Press through access to information.

We recognize that the statistics, while dreadful, continue in the face of various governments. There is no question that previous Liberal governments and this Conservative government have made announcements, provided funding, and have said they would deal with this issue. Yet it remains an ongoing scandal.

I remember how shocked I was when a friend of mine who worked in a first nations community, Burnt Church, New Brunswick, described to me how the local hospital had to have water trucked in. That is how deeply we are failing first nations communities, that even a local hospital had to rely on trucking in bottled water because safe drinking water supplies were just not available.

What are the issues here? Some of them were discussed in a brief exchange between the hon. parliamentary secretary and the member for Edmonton—Strathcona. The member for Edmonton—Strathcona does have a long history on this issue, having authored a book on first nations governance around water issues.

Business of Supply

Clearly we have to start finding a solution with fundamental respect for the rights, jurisdiction and responsibilities of first nations themselves. In the words of Grand Chief Shawn Atleo of the Assembly of First Nations, this was where the previous government legislation, which started in the Senate, Bill S-11, was so fatally flawed. It did not start with engagement that respected the rights and jurisdiction of first nations. We have to start with that.

The government has said in the past that it would enter into consultations with first nations to develop a water governance model that would work. To date we know there have been 13 engagement sessions that took place in 2009. That does not constitute the kind of full engagement with first nations governments that is required to really understand how we develop shared jurisdiction in this area, with a water governance model that will actually work. How do we develop that? It starts with talking to first nations about a shared model.

Once we respect first nations rights and jurisdiction, we then have to look at what they are saying about the problem. Grand Chief Shawn Atleo has said that there is a large capacity gap. In other words, we could impose regulations on first nations communities, but we have not addressed important holistic issues, respecting traditional knowledge, for example, attempting to support first nations in their communities through respect and government to government negotiations in order to create first nations water governance models that would actually work and are supported by enhanced capacity.

• (1650)

It is not all pipes that we need. It is more than that. It has to be holistic. We need to address the requirements in first nations communities.

Yes, we do need more money. That is going to be essential to providing any framework that works. We need water treatment systems. We need to develop those systems that make sense in the context of first nations communities, often in remote areas.

We need to stop polluting first nations water. This is pretty fundamental, but if someone lives downstream from a large pulp and paper mill that is not watching its effluent, if someone is downstream from the Athabasca tar sands, downstream from areas of pollution, or in the case of first nations communities where cranes lived all around and were surrounded by greater mercury contamination from the large hydro plants, there are going to be specific water pollution problems that are not simply bacteriological. It will not simply be dealt with through dealing with contamination in a bacteriological sense.

This holistic view starts with protecting water at source, ensuring there is capacity in first nations communities and ensuring we are respecting the rights and jurisdictions of first nations communities.

I am not trying to cast blame in any way here at all across party lines. It is important that on this issue, for once, we act in a non-partisan fashion that recognizes that, in a serial sense, there has been a serial failure here that is not something we can peg on one government or another.

It is something that speaks to who we are as a nation, that we come together, that we respect the primary responsibility that this is a

governance issue where we are on somebody else's territory. In a very real sense, anywhere in Canada we are on somebody else's territory. However, specifically in first nations communities, those rights and responsibilities of jurisdiction cannot be abridged, cannot be ignored, cannot be conveniently treated as non-issues because we have decided we are going to put a particular type of water plant in and we are going to tell people how it is going to work.

We have had enough failures, as we know, with high tech water plants across Canada in non-indigenous communities that we should not be arrogant about this. The great failure of the Halifax water treatment plant comes to mind, after billions were spent. We need to approach this issue as a shared partnership to ensure safe drinking water for every first nations community.

Going forward from that, this day of debate and discussion in the House of Commons is an excellent start. We certainly have been admonished. We have been admonished by Sheila Fraser, as Auditor General, in her final statement to us as parliamentarians, that after years of filing reports pointing out the failure to deliver clean drinking water to first nations communities, she wonders if we can ever make any progress at all.

This is our moment. Let us not lose it. We are coming together. We agree on something. Let us work together on it.

My last thought goes to the question of drinking water in Canada overall. Now that we are addressing first nations drinking water in a non-partisan fashion across all parties in the House of Commons, can we not look at the larger question of how we regulate drinking water in general?

I may not be right about this, I just want to share this. I'm thinking out loud. Is there something wrong with the overarching framework of drinking water in Canada that we do not regulate the safety of drinking water in Canada? We regulate food safety. There have been various attempts in the Senate over the years to put forward a bill that would reclassify water as food, so that we would then regulate the safety of water.

We do not regulate the safety of water. We have federal government guidelines from Health Canada and when they are not being observed, there is no enforcement mechanism. Generally, enforcement for safe drinking water in Canada has been a process that involves media stories, headlines, and trying to get attention. Unless it is a desperate situation like Walkerton, sometimes drinking water standards, even in a non-first nations context, are not getting adequate attention.

Perhaps it is time that we address the need for a safe drinking water act that will reach all Canadian taps, all Canadian faucets, all Canadian homes. In doing that we will have created a federal framework within which the rights and responsibilities, and the appropriate jurisdictions of first nations can be respected as we augment the failures by providing significant resources to providing safe drinking water everywhere in this country, but particularly in that area of exclusive federal responsibility which we share with first nations on first nations reserves across Canada.

I am thankful for having the opportunity to speak to this. I look forward to questions.

Business of Supply

● (1655)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the topic of consultation that the member opposite referred to, in the summer of 2006 the expert panel held a series of public hearings for first nations across Canada, hearing from over 110 presenters and receiving more than two dozen written submissions.

In April 2007 a joint workshop was held between federal officials and the Assembly of First Nations technical water expert group to engage technical experts on the government's proposed option, incorporation by reference, and allow the experts to identify issues and challenges that would need to be resolved in order to effectively implement this option.

From May to July 2008, INAC, Health Canada and Environment Canada met with regional first nations organizations, the Assembly of First Nations and provincial territorial officials to prepare for future engagement sessions on a legislative framework. First nations expressed support for continued discussions on the development of legislation and regulations.

From February through March of 2009 a series of engagement sessions were held with first nations communities, regional first nations organizations and provincial-territorial officials, and these sessions offered a forum for participants to suggest solutions and recommendations on how to best address the existing regulatory gap for drinking water and waste water in first nations communities.

In 2009-10 the federal government met with first nations chiefs and first nations organizers to discuss specific regional issues raised during the engagement sessions held from February to March 2009. During these sessions, key elements of the draft legislation were shared in deck format.

In the same spirit of co-operation that was afforded the member to share her time during this debate, would she be willing to co-operate with the government in helping—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, it is not an easy matter to conduct the kind of consultations that meet the standards of Supreme Court of Canada decisions, such as in *Delgamuukw*, *Weyerhaeuser*, *Haida Gwaii* First Nation, and challenges to consultations.

We can invite first nations to provide briefs and hold meetings, but if it has not started with a fundamental respect, and some of these meetings may have been well-intentioned and met the standard, the reality of consultations with first nations is that they are government to government. They are not merely a matter of taking briefs on board as if we are dealing with NGOs. The consultation mechanism must start with a sign-off with the Assembly of First Nations as the body that represents the chiefs and councils of first nations across Canada, and must be engaged in a respectful government to government relationship. That will bring better results.

In answer to the member's question, yes, I am more than happy to do anything I can to help. I think we should work together.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member who just spoke talked of fundamental respect. I would like to make an aside, a little comment meant for everyone here. Nearly 150 years ago, two founding peoples decided to create this country. A third people was deliberately left out of the discussion, left out of the creation of this country. And this colonialism still exists. We, the political representatives of the two founding peoples, are going to decide what right the third people has to water and what the quality of that water will be.

These discussions will go on and on as long as we do not accept the fundamental fact that the Indian Act is colonial and outdated. These discussions will take place as long as we refuse to recognize the first nations as one of the founding peoples. Two or three years from now, we will be talking about housing and education rights. That is the problem. The first nations have a basic right to be part of the discussion and to fundamental respect.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his comments. Generally, we agree, but the question of the role of the Indian Act concerns aboriginal people first and foremost. National Chief Atleo has said that there are major problems with the act. He wants to see changes made to it, but that is an issue for a broader dialogue than today's debate on the right to clean, safe water.

● (1700)

[English]

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonaville—Gander—Grand Falls—Windor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague from St. Paul's who has provided a great deal of leadership. I would also like to thank and congratulate the preceding speaker from Saanich—Gulf Islands, the leader of the Green Party, who did a fantastic job on her speech. It was a pleasure sharing the time with her.

I was just reading this morning about boil water advisories, which has been an ongoing issue in my home province of Newfoundland and Labrador. There are approximately 200 of them right now, which is a substantial amount for an island province and of course the mainland portion of Labrador. That is a quite a number for a province with a little bit over 500,000 people.

That gives us an idea of the situation we have and what we are dealing with, especially in some of the more remote and rural areas, and those that are of first nations are extremely vulnerable when it comes to this.

We have signed on to many agreements and we have had many aspirations that tell us that we should look at this as a human right for individuals who want clean drinking water and who have a right to receive it. Certainly, our government has the responsibility to live up to these standards, to meet with the right people and the community groups that are on the forefront of this issue.

As my hon. colleague just pointed out, regarding the particular groups in this particular situation, we get the information from them, we go through the consultation processes, and then in the end we seem to fail to connect that bridge between the action items we decide we want to do. I know some cynics would say that usually happens in government. In many cases it happens.

Unfortunately, in this case and in many others, action does not happen soon enough, and because it does not happen soon enough the most vulnerable are the first ones to receive the worst part of this, which is not receiving clean drinking water.

I want to congratulate the member for Toronto Centre, the leader of our party for bringing this motion forward, as well as the member for St. Paul's.

I would like to get into this particular document first. I find that it is one that is pertinent and that creates an international standard that we have to live up to. I have read this before and I find that it is actually a fantastic document to read from. I will cite from article 21:

Indigenous peoples have the right, without discrimination, to the improvement of their economic and social conditions, including, *inter alia*, in the areas of education, employment, vocational training and retraining, housing, sanitation, health and social security.

States shall take effective measures and, where appropriate, special measures to ensure continuing improvement of their economic and social conditions. Particular attention shall be paid to the rights and special needs of indigenous elders, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities.

Therein lies the responsibility of governance, not just this particular government but other governments. I know we have been lost in debate about whether this is an aspirational thing to do, or is something that we must do in the immediate term. Anything we sign on to has to have the right policies in place in order to turn these into action items and to make these goals into realities, and to reduce the number of communities across this country that do not need to boil their water just to receive the basic service of clean water, like many nations do.

We have experience in the past little while where we have signed on to a few treaties, and yet the action that follows has become futile at best. Unfortunately, it gets bogged down into a lot of the machinations of bureaucracy and the machinations of how we debate in this House, and how we are confrontational in the way we handle politics here in the House of Commons, which is extremely disappointing.

My colleague from Saanich—Gulf Islands touched on this just a short time ago, when asking about congeniality and how we could come to a common agreement. Nobody in this House would ever say, "Let's hold on. Let's just not do this right now. Let's put this down the list when it comes to providing clean drinking water". Nobody would say that.

• (1705)

However, for some reason we start to debate the details of this and the narrative gets lost, the narrative being providing clean drinking water. Pardon the vernacular, but sometimes we need to collectively give our heads a shake in order to realize what the end result of this would be.

My niece, who is from Newfoundland and Labrador, is a school teacher who taught in Attawapiskat. When I went there to see her, I

was struck by a community that I thought was in need of so many of the basic services, such as housing, water, health care and education. Even though it was considered a remote community and although over time the conditions had become worse, I wondered how it had arrived at that point.

At what point should we say that the standards by which these people are living are not measuring up to the international agreements that we signed? How does that happen in a country like Canada when we have become the leader of the world, when we have become the country that everybody wants to become? Many international leaders have said that we need to bring Canada to the rest of the world. The problem with bringing Canada to the rest of the world is that it would bring this as well. It would bring forward the fact that we are making some mistakes.

We need to aspire to all the goals that are outlined within this particular agreement, but more important, we need to turn these into action.

I want to talk about some of the back and forth that has been happening over the last little while.

The federal government is responsible for supplying first nations on reserve communities with the tools and resources that they require, all the services that I listed prior on some of the first nations communities that I visited. The duty is divided among three ministries. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development provides funding to first nations for infrastructure repair and managed water services in their communities. Health Canada monitors water quality management on reserves. Environment Canada manages sourced water protection.

In many cases, I have heard that the rules and regulations have taken effect in many communities, not just aboriginal communities but non-aboriginal communities as well. This is one of the big reasons that, in places like Newfoundland and Labrador, there are over 200 boil water advisories in the smallest of the communities. The reason is that local governance has become extremely frustrated in dealing with that higher end of government. This argument is not new. This argument pertains to many departments.

As was pointed out earlier, we need to engage in discussions with the people at the very base of any particular community that sees itself under a boil water advisory. I have some of them in my riding. They are non-aboriginal. The problem is such that the infrastructure crumbles beneath them. For aboriginal communities, like Attawapiskat, it was even much worse. It has so much to overcome. People who consider themselves an expert on infrastructure and providing clean water must look at this and ask where we start. However, we need to start somewhere.

I am glad we are raising this issue because maybe today's debate will create a spark by which we will be able to make that mechanism a far easier way to help the most vulnerable.

I want to again thank my colleagues for doing this today because I have heard some really great stuff concerning not just clean water, but the basic human rights of communities and individuals. Canada is the greatest country for communities because we band together and we band together to make better communities for our children. What we have here is a great debate.

Private Members' Business

I would encourage us to move from this point, as my friend from Saanich—Gulf Islands pointed out, to a point of positive action to ensure that the basic human right of clean water that is outlined in international agreements comes to fruition in a great country like Canada.

• (1710)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments from my colleague on what we believe is a very important issue.

In Manitoba, the impact is so profound that we look to the government to give it extra attention. The Government of Manitoba wants to work with the federal government to see something happen on this file.

I wonder if my colleague could comment on how important it is that provincial governments, such as Manitoba, get involved where they might be able to ensure that quality water is delivered to all citizens.

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, I neglected to mention the conversations that take place at the federal-provincial level. We know about this in Newfoundland and Labrador with the situation we had several years ago in northern Labrador.

I do not feel that standards are as vigorously enforced as they should be. My colleague from British Columbia mentioned the same thing earlier. When it comes to the standards by which we judge clean drinking water, where is the law on this? Where are the regulations? Where does it say that we need to have this? In order to have a basic human right fulfilled, we need to have a law that is enforceable so that the people have an opportunity to fight for their basic human rights through the processes that we have in the country.

I noticed in a letter to my hon. colleague for St. Paul's from the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development that it talked about the assessment released on July 14, 2011. It reads:

...the majority of risk is due to capacity issues, although infrastructure issues and lack of enforceable standards are also a factor. Department officials are engaging with First Nations and other stakeholders on the recommendations and next steps.

Herein lies what I think is a monumental task. It has a lot to do with communication, more so than getting the right equipment in there to ensure this happens and engaging the community in the best way possible, but a lot of times we do not do that.

I suspect that a couple of months from now those 200 boil water advisories I spoke of in my province will still be there. A lot of it has to do with the communication. We need to provide the spark in order for the federal government to talk with the provincial and territorial governments, as well as first nations groups across this country, including people like Shawn Atleo.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this has been a very worthwhile debate today. I think the spirit in which of some of the presentations have been made have been positive and with some very good points made. We know very well that government after government of different political stripes and some provincial initiatives that have been undertaken were well-intended but governments have fallen short.

Earlier in the debate, before I had to leave the chamber, the comment was made about access to freshwater. Two of the main health factors and greatest challenges first nations communities face right now are obesity and diabetes. We are seeing first nations consuming more pop because, in some rural communities, the cost of milk is unaffordable and they drink pop instead. If they had access to clean drinking water, would my colleague think that this would—

• (1715)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. I must interrupt the hon. member for Cape Breton—Canso. We will not have the opportunity to hear the answer from his colleague.

It being 5:15 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

The question is on the amendment. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Amendment agreed to)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion as amended?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion, as amended, agreed to)

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, I ask that you see the clock at 5:30.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Does the Chief Government Whip have unanimous support to see the clock at 5:30?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It being 5:30, the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

PREVENTING PERSONS FROM CONCEALING THEIR IDENTITY DURING RIOTS AND UNLAWFUL ASSEMBLIES ACT

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC) moved that Bill C-309, An Act to amend the Criminal code (concealment of identity), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to open debate today on my private member's Bill C-309, the preventing persons from concealing their identity during riots and unlawful assemblies act.

This legislation would add new penalties for wearing a disguise to those sections of the Criminal Code that deal with individuals who participate in a riot or an unlawful assembly. This bill is a measured response to a problem that law enforcement officials have grappled with for years, and the need for which has been further highlighted by recent events in the cities of Toronto and Vancouver.

At the G20 meetings in Toronto, and again in Vancouver after game seven of the Stanley Cup playoffs in June, law-abiding citizens were assaulted; businesses were broken into, vandalized and looted of their merchandise; and public property owned by taxpayers, such as police cars, was torched and destroyed. These violent events had a theme in common that was noted by law enforcement officers who were working to protect public safety at the time. They noted the prevalence of people who wore masks or facial coverings to conceal their identities during the commission of criminal acts.

According to police, some of the perpetrators deliberately masked up prior to the gatherings becoming violent, while others mingled in the crowd and covered their faces in order to carry out criminal acts of opportunity. These offenders vandalized property and assaulted police officers and innocent bystanders. They say a picture is worth a thousand words. Who here can forget the images from Vancouver of looters with their shirts, jackets or hockey jerseys yanked up over their face while streaming through broken store windows with heaps of stolen merchandise, or thugs jumping into the crowds to kick or hit an innocent bystander in the thick of the rioting?

These images tell a very revealing story. They tell us that criminals are well aware in this age of social media and all-pervasive cellphone cameras that they run a very high risk of their behaviour being recorded and they had better hide their identity if they want to avoid being caught and brought to justice for their actions. More and more of them are doing exactly that. In too many cases, these offenders escape identification by covering or obscuring their face at the time of the offence. This is an unacceptable state of affairs. No one should be able to commit violent and destructive crimes against persons and property with impunity under a cloak of anonymity, yet that is exactly what we have seen happen in these cases.

Police have long advised that their inability to pre-emptively deal with individuals who were concealing their identities in the middle of such explosive situations is hindering their ability to maintain control and to protect the public. Currently, there is no authority for police to pre-emptively stop people from concealing their identity in a riot. They must observe an offence before they can move to stop it, even by a masked individual and even in a riot. Their powers in these dangerous situations are reactive rather than proactive. Our Criminal Code does provide a penalty for disguise with intent in subsection 351(2).

When police in Vancouver recently recommended charges of participating in a riot against some of the suspected rioters there, they did in fact propose charges under that section in a very small number of cases, but why only in a small number of cases? In only a small number of cases where people had their faces concealed were police able to verify the suspect's identity afterwards.

The charge of disguise with intent can be a challenging one to apply, and since it is applied in the aftermath of an incident, it is not altogether helpful in actually controlling riot situations as they occur.

A police officer trying to maintain control in the midst of a riot has little time or means to meet the high level of intent needed to satisfy subsection 351(2). They are too busy defending life and limb, their own and those of the citizens they were sworn to protect. Yet police repeatedly tell us that it is these very people, those who disguise

themselves and mask their faces, that are most often the instigators and the ringleaders of such trouble.

What if there were a measure designed to strip away anonymity from criminals during such disturbances? What if the very act of wearing a disguise in a riot became in and of itself an offence? What if police had the means to order those who were concealing their identities in a riot to remove their disguises or risk detainment or arrest? That would change the stakes dramatically.

• (1720)

People would then have a very clear choice in front of them. They could choose to remove their disguise, show their face and be identified and held accountable for their criminal actions, or they could choose not to and risk arrest for the offence of wearing a mask in a riot. Either way, public safety would be improved.

It would improve public safety by providing a new deterrent for people to wear disguises in the first place. If people think twice about concealing themselves, then surely the prospect of committing a crime without the benefit of anonymity would give them even greater pause. This would allow us to better identify people who engage in criminal riotous behaviour and it would improve the police's ability to deal with people who are wearing disguises at the time of an incident, thereby preventing them from rioting at all.

This bill is a good idea, but it is not necessarily a new idea. Other democratic governments, such as those in the United Kingdom, France and the State of New York, have developed legislation that would either limit or prohibit the wearing of disguises, masks or facial coverings. For example, in 2001, the United Kingdom passed the anti-terrorism crime and security act, which includes sections regarding the use of masks and disguises.

It is only when a peaceful protest or assembly turns into a riot or an unlawful assembly that the provisions of the bill would come into force.

When does a peaceful assembly become a riot or an unlawful assembly? The Criminal Code tells us when. It tells us that an unlawful assembly has occurred when:

—three or more persons who, with intent to carry out any common purpose, assemble in such a manner or so conduct themselves when they are assembled as to cause persons in the neighbourhood of the assembly to fear, on reasonable grounds, that they

(a) will disturb the peace tumultuously; or

(b) will, by that assembly needlessly and without reasonable cause provoke other persons to disturb the peace tumultuously.

When do we know that police are dealing with a riot situation? Again, the Criminal Code, in section 64, tells us a riot is occurring when “an unlawful assembly has begun to disturb the peace tumultuously”.

We see in law that an unlawful assembly evolves into a riot when there is tumultuous conduct by participants. Typically this involves acts of violence or threatened violence, or destruction of property.

Private Members' Business

Both definitions provide us with clear indicators of when a peaceful assembly has ceased to be such and when police are now intervening in an illegal act. It is therefore no infringement on charter rights to peaceful assembly for police to intervene when such an assembly has degraded into either an unlawful assembly or a riot.

It is in those same situations when police are working to restore order that the provisions of Bill C-309 would make it necessary for any masks or disguises worn by participants to be taken off immediately.

Riots and unlawful assemblies already carry Criminal Code penalties. Bill C-309 would simply amend already existing sections of the code to make it an added offence to wear a mask or other disguise to conceal one's identity during these illegal acts.

Let us be clear. Anyone who is wearing a mask or a disguise to conceal his or her face in the midst of a riot is exhibiting aggravating behaviour. Law-abiding citizens who get caught up in a riot will naturally be seeking to clear the area on police orders. It is hard to imagine that others who ignore police instructions to depart the area and who, in addition, continue to linger in the vicinity while wearing a disguise are seized by any innocent motives or good intentions in those kind of circumstances.

This bill would not remove police discretion. Police who are trying to restore order and protect safety in a riot situation are not likely to be interested in pursuing anyone who is already obeying orders to leave the area. In fact, someone fleeing the scene of a riot on police orders may in a real sense be seen as no longer participating in a riot as defined by the code.

It is not the people leaving the scene of trouble who have the police's attention. It is the loitering, masked troublemakers who concern the police. Someone with his or her shirt up to block out tear gas for example is not likely to concern riot control police if that individual is actively running away from the scene. However, individuals who come prepared with gas masks or bandanas and are wearing them in the trouble spot in defiance of police directions to move on is another story.

• (1725)

There is evidence that at these riots many of the people wearing masks and facial coverings were part of organized groups with premeditated intent on confronting the police and causing mayhem. In addition to targeting the criminals of opportunity that we see at riots, this law also targets anarchists, those individuals who come to protest with the premeditated intent to use the assembly as a cover for their criminal behaviour.

Anarchist groups are increasingly employing the tactic of concealing their identity by wearing disguises, masks, or other facial coverings for the purpose of committing unlawful acts in a riot situation. Police have seen it time and again, individuals with their faces concealed mixing into a group and then instigating riotous behaviour, such as throwing objects at police, tossing marbles under the legs of police horses to trip them up, or covering up their faces before smashing windows, setting fires, stealing, assaulting people or flipping over vehicles. These individuals then remove their facial coverings and slip away in the confusion, some never to be

apprehended. It is vexing for police and dangerous for the public to see such individuals escape the consequences of their actions.

I would argue that their clean getaways in fact embolden them to redouble their efforts and engage in criminality again, but Bill C-309 presents a new tool for police to deal with them. These people would now risk arrest for wearing their masks in a riot. Police would no longer have to wait for them to start assaulting people and destroying property before they could move against them.

Police know they need this ability to act pre-emptively against disguised individuals in riot situations. Police chiefs in a number of Canada's major cities, including Calgary, Toronto, Vancouver and Victoria, have all told me they support my bill.

Vancouver Chief Constable Jim Chu had this specifically to say about my bill:

The Vancouver Police Department is pleased to support this bill. When we see protestors in a crowd donning masks and hoods we know there is a very good chance that violence will soon follow.

In a resolution that he drafted this year for the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, Victoria Chief Constable Jamie Graham urged the government to take aim at this particular problem. His resolution had this to say about masked individuals: "Wearing facial covering allows an offender to blend in and mix with a larger lawful group of peaceful individuals without being identified. There an offender may commit unlawful acts under disguise then remove their masks or facial coverings and blend in with peaceful protestors." It goes on to say: "Wearing a disguise, masks or other facial coverings allows a person to conceal their identity whose intent it is to commit an unlawful act prior to, during or immediately after a lawful assembly or protest."

Police know through hard experience that it is often the organized ring leaders or instigators of such trouble who come prepared with materials to conceal their identities, or it is people who decide in the thick of things to assault others or destroy property who will attempt to conceal their identities, as we saw in Vancouver. Whoever they are, organized or not, no one in Canada should be able to hide in plain sight while committing crimes.

I have heard some suggest that if this bill passes, it may target individuals who wear facial coverings for religious or cultural reasons, but that view fails to take into account the exemption in this bill for lawful excuse. My bill states:

Every person who commits an offence...while wearing a mask or other disguise to conceal their identity without lawful excuse is guilty of an indictable offence—

What are examples of a lawful excuse? Someone who legitimately wears cultural or religious dress that obscures the face, or bandages for legitimate medical purposes, for example, might fall under the exemption. Someone who could demonstrate a lawful excuse that is legitimate and provable for wearing a face covering would not face the penalties of Bill C-309, although the person would still face the existing penalties for participating in a riot.

Private Members' Business

I will close by urging my colleagues in the House to support Bill C-309. I am convinced that no one in the chamber of any political persuasion wants to see repeats of the destruction and violence that took place in Vancouver and Toronto. This bill has the potential to deter and de-escalate such unfortunate events in the future to protect persons and property. I sincerely hope that all members will join me in moving the bill forward.

• (1730)

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's bill. It raises some interesting questions. Would the lawful excuse exemption apply to police officers acting as agents provocateurs or attempts to become part of the riot, as has been experienced in Quebec?

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Speaker, first and foremost, this legislation is designed specifically for people who are participating in riots. If police officers are trying to control the situation, they are obviously not participants in the riot. They are there to try to stop the riot.

Second, lawful excuse applies. Anyone who has lawful excuse to be wearing a facial covering, whatever the reason might be, would certainly not be touched under this legislation.

This is intended for the people who are trying to cause harm to other individuals and to property, while disguising themselves to commit those crimes with impunity. This is intended to cover that.

• (1735)

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my concern with the legislation also relates to the wide breadth given to the phrase "lawful excuse" by the hon. member and the fact that this bill to amend the Criminal Code has been brought forward as a private member's bill.

It strikes me that with the government's preoccupation with law and order and the fact that there have been substantial amendments to criminal legislation already, the breadth of the term "lawful excuse", which causes me great concern from a charter perspective, would be subject to much further and better scrutiny from the perspective of whether there would be a charter violation if this had come in as a piece of government legislation. There would also be the opportunity for much more debate.

On this side we have very serious concerns about the constitutionality of the legislation and we do not share the narrow reading that he does with respect to the "lawful excuse". I would invite his comments on that.

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Speaker, first, I have crafted the legislation to try to deal with a problem that we have in the country, one that has been identified to me many times by police chiefs and officers who have tried to control these kinds of situations.

The member also mentions that our government has brought forward a number of pieces of legislation to deal with what we see as some of the issues in the Criminal Code, which were left by the previous Liberal government, the party of which he is a member. It chose to ignore these situations and leave them unfixed for many years.

We are attempting to right some of the wrongs that were left by the previous government of which he is a member of that party. I am

proud of those pieces of legislation that our government has brought forward.

However, this is legislation that I have designed in response to a specific problem that we see lacking in the Criminal Code. He mentions debate, and I certainly welcome all debate that is possible in the House. At committee level, I would be open to any suggestions I hear from members.

This legislation is designed to specifically fix a problem that police officers have identified to me in terms of trying to control these situations from getting out of hand.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to applaud the member for Wild Rose for Bill C-309, for his interest in public safety and for responding to concerns raised by police officers and citizens about providing more tools where there is a need and a gap in the Criminal Code to ensure that public safety is first and foremost the goal of our government and the goal of Canadians.

I note his amendment to the Criminal Code proposes a term of five years imprisonment for offenders. However, I also know that section 351(2) of the code also has an offence for disguise with intent and it proposes a term of imprisonment not to exceed 10 years.

Has the member for Wild Rose given any consideration to amending his bill to harmonize his penalties with what is in the Criminal Code today?

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Speaker, this has been previously raised by other members of the House as well.

I did have to have some consideration of what the penalties would be, looking at various other offences in the Criminal Code and trying to find a way to make it seem a reasonable penalty.

In this case, with the other section 351 being 10 years, it does seem like a very reasonable amendment. It is something that I am definitely considering. I am definitely going to raise that at the committee level. I look forward to the conversation I will have at the committee level. This may be an amendment that we make to the bill.

[Translation]

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when examining the provisions of a bill, I think parliamentarians have a duty to ask themselves a simple question: will this bill improve our society? Today we are looking at Bill C-309, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (concealment of identity). I have no doubt that the author of this bill was motivated by a desire to improve public safety. That seems to be the answer the government automatically gives these days. Thus, members really need to ask themselves if this bill is an effective way to improve public safety.

Private Members' Business

Let us be clear: like all parties, the NDP condemns any vandalism and criminal behaviour at any assembly. Furthermore, we fully agree that any crime committed by someone wearing a mask deserves a tougher sentence. The NDP fully supports the sections of the Criminal Code that protect the public against seditious behaviour, vandalism and the masked individuals who commit these acts. What worries me, however, is the direction in which bills like this on public safety are taking us. I imagine this bill was drafted in response to the problem of crimes committed anonymously by people wearing masks during unlawful assemblies or riots.

No one is denying the troubling images that came out of the recent riots in Vancouver, Montreal and Toronto. In fact, I have a great deal of empathy for all the small businesses and shops that were damaged during these demonstrations. It is extremely sad, and I hope they will be compensated for this. In some cases, some of the offenders did indeed wear masks; I am aware of that. If this bill truly is a response to those events, then it is the responsibility of this House to determine whether it is a suitable and adequate response. Let us look at the content of this bill.

It proposes two very simple changes to the Criminal Code. Clause 2 of the bill calls for a change to section 65 of the Criminal Code making it a criminal offence to wear a mask or any other disguise when participating in a riot. The bill also proposes amending section 66 of the Criminal Code, which is essentially the same thing, but in the context of an unlawful assembly.

I want to come back to my original question: will this legislation improve our society? Changing our society for the better means recognizing a problem and being willing to solve it. As I was saying before, the NDP fully supports subsection 351(2) of the Criminal Code, which makes it an offence to cover one's face in the commission of a crime. The courts have recognized that wearing a mask during the commission of a crime can be considered an aggravating factor during sentencing. There are existing measures for handing down tougher sentences for an act committed by a criminal who wears a mask.

How will this bill help Canadians? Is the purpose of Bill C-309 to make it illegal to take part in a riot or unlawful assembly? In that case, Canadians are already protected by the Criminal Code. If the purpose of the bill is to introduce punitive measures against someone who commits a crime, such as vandalism, while taking part in a riot or unlawful assembly, Canadians are already protected by the Criminal Code, as I explained previously. If the purpose is to increase sentences for individuals who commit crimes while concealing their identity, once again, Canadians are protected by court decisions.

Under the Criminal Code, taking part in a riot or unlawful assembly and committing vandalism or other crimes during an unlawful assembly are already illegal, and concealing one's identity while committing a crime during an unlawful assembly or riot is considered to be an aggravating factor. Therefore, I question the need for this bill. I believe that it is basically redundant. The main issues of public safety that are the basis for this bill are already covered by the Criminal Code. This bill's only new contribution is to make it an offence to conceal one's identity while taking part in a riot or unlawful assembly.

● (1740)

According to this bill, an individual could be detained, arrested, indicted and sentenced to a maximum of five years in prison simply for being a masked spectator in the area of an unlawful assembly.

In June 2010, during the G20 in Toronto, Canadians witnessed how a small riot led to police crackdowns. The result: thousands of innocent people were arrested and detained. Approximately 1,500 Canadians were arrested or detained as a result of a riot involving fewer than 20 people. The authorities subjectively considered the whole demonstration as an unlawful assembly and took away the civil liberties of 1,500 innocent demonstrators, journalists and spectators. We must remember these events when we are considering a bill such as this one.

The limitations imposed on civil liberties to ensure public safety must be the least restrictive possible. I think that all the hon. members would agree with me on this. Otherwise, there is no limit to the restrictions that can be imposed on fundamental freedoms.

I would also like to point out that this bill takes away an individual's right to demonstrate anonymously. An individual is not necessarily going to commit a crime just because he or she is wearing a mask at a riot. It is reasonable to think that the person just wants to remain anonymous and protect his or her identity.

In the context of this bill, we must recognize the risk of political profiling of people exercising their civil liberties. Too often, 99% of protestors are peaceful, while 1% choose to vandalize. More often than not, this 1% is condemned by the vast majority of the peaceful protestors. As we saw in Toronto in June 2010, the peaceful protestors and spectators can be close to non-peaceful protestors. But this bill could lead to the arrest of innocent protestors who wear masks because of their geographic proximity to non-peaceful protestors.

It bears repeating that criminals who conceal their identity are already punished more severely in this country. I also want to point out that this bill would give judges the discretionary power under the Criminal Code to consider an offence committed while wearing a mask as an aggravating factor. Some people may consider that to be a good thing. However, a 2005 judgment by the Provincial Court of Alberta, *R. v. Potter*, already provides that protection.

I would like to thank the member for introducing this bill in the House. I understand the source of his concerns. However, in its current form, this bill is redundant and could have serious consequences for civil liberties in this country. I encourage members in this House to carefully examine the implications of this bill and to ask themselves whether it is worth jeopardizing our civil liberties. I am leaving it up to the House to decide on an appropriate course of action.

• (1745)

[English]

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to speak to Bill C-309, but I want to begin by confronting the Conservatives on their obsession with crime. We have before us a bill ostensibly produced by the folks in the Prime Minister's Office or the Conservative House leader's office. I think we need to be clear about this. Their so-called crime agenda is in full swing, predicated on ideology and not evidence. They do not believe in evidence or facts.

The Conservatives want to continue creating fear among Canadians and to perpetuate the idea that there is rampant crime on the streets, that there are riots everywhere, that the government, in response, must be brave and take decisive action to breathe life into that particular bogeyman. On the rare occasion that Conservatives might actually propose something that appears worthy of some consideration, they wonder why Canadians are suspicious.

The Conservatives' record of ignoring evidence and perpetuating fear is well-known. The fear agenda gives me rise to questions about their sincerity. One only has to look at Bill C-10, safe streets and communities act. As far as I am concerned, it should be called "keeping the myth of out of control crime alive so we can fundraise to our right-wing base act".

For the Conservatives, repeating a myth often enough convinces them that it must be true. It is a classic right-wing Republican tactic; that is to say, the Conservatives operate not unlike a pack of hyenas. They see an opportunity to feast on the fears of Canadians, fears which are often of their own creation, and then they pounce. As part of the bullying tactics, they are always ready to attack anyone who disagrees with them, then issue a fundraising letter containing more myths. This behaviour, now firmly rooted in their political DNA, is a again not unlike the hyena, opportunistic and completely natural. Then they call it tough on crime. I call it tough on facts and evidence.

When I meet people around the country and in my riding, they are not running up to me and talking about crime or crime rates. They are more concerned about jobs and the economy. They are concerned that my riding of Charlottetown is losing 500 jobs as a result of cuts to Veterans Affairs. They are worried about the cuts to Service Canada and the closure of EI processing centres.

They do not understand why the federal government is the only level of government that will not participate in the funding to clean up a sewage problem in the Charlottetown harbour. They do not understand why the Conservatives have cancelled a cable that would ensure energy security to Prince Edward Island.

Here we are with another crime bill. Why did the member not introduce a bill to reduce poverty in Canada, a bill to help the poor, and to bring them in from the margins of poverty? Why did he not do that?

It is as if the Conservatives lie awake at night dreaming about ways to put more and more people in prison. It is an obsession rooted not in science or evidence, or even reason. It is irrational.

Private Members' Business

I want to assure the member that none of us on this side will stand by while Conservatives proffer myths or slogans. None of us on this side will tolerate the idea that because we disagree with the Conservatives on matters related to crime, that somehow we do not care or we are soft on crime. It is a falsehood and the members opposite know it. To disagree with the government is not a crime, at least not yet, but who knows?

With respect to the bill, we all witnessed what happened in Vancouver last year during the Stanley Cup. We know that the behaviour of far too many people was deplorable and criminal. None of us who sat around watching the hockey game that night and the news stories thereafter were thinking, gee, we wish there were more destruction and violence. None of us said, "Gee, I hope that guy who just set fire to the car gets away with it". Listening to the Conservatives though, one would think that members from this side were there and involved.

• (1750)

I wonder what the member thinks about his own government's behaviour with respect to the G20 in Toronto. What does he think about what occurred, when at the G20 peaceful protesters, yes, peaceful protesters, were summarily denied their constitutional and charter rights to freely assemble?

What does he think, when protesters, acting peacefully, not violently, were kettled, rounded up and detained in violation of their charter rights? Why is the member not proposing a bill about protecting the rights of legitimate protesters?

What is his position on those well-documented violations of constitutional rights? Does he believe that citizens have a right to peaceful protest? Why is it that he and his government have refused thus far a public inquiry into the behaviour of the police and his own government with respect to the serious and rampant violation of constitutional rights at the G20?

The right of Canadians to assemble, and to do so peacefully, is a right protected by the charter, a document that many on the other side deep down really do detest. Rioting is already a crime, as the member knows.

The bill before us is deliberately framed in a way that if anyone were to disagree or to suggest amendments, he or she would automatically be designated as a traitor to a Conservative crime cause. Conservatives call that debate?

No one wants to support any Canadian engaging in activity that destroys property, encourages violence and rioting. None of us wish to support the deliberate concealment of someone while engaging in a riot. However, if this government were truly serious about this issue, this proposal would be on the government agenda. If it were brought in by government, it would have been open to have been tested, as required by statute by the Department of Justice, to ensure that it was constitutional.

Private Members' Business

This is a government bill in disguise. The suggestion that a backbench MP, in this environment, in the controlled and contrived Conservative government, such as the one we have now, would produce a bill without the consent of the PMO and its House leader's office is quite frankly a stretch.

If the government were serious about amending the Criminal Code to deal with aggravating circumstances, such as those contemplated in this private member's bill, it should have introduced a government bill. At least that would have allowed for greater and wider debate. The Conservatives are not interested in debate, nor facts, nor evidence. We see a sad example happening right now in the justice committee.

We will review Bill C-309, insist that it receive a thorough analysis, and if necessary, propose amendments. Until we are convinced that the bill meets the test of the charter, we will not and cannot support it.

Members should listen to this because what I am about to say will probably send shivers up the spines of the Conservatives. If we can be convinced by evidence and facts, and the testimony of experts that this bill is constitutional, then let the debate begin.

• (1755)

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to add to the debate of Bill C-309, a bill to prevent persons from concealing their identities during a riot or unlawful assembly.

I would like to provide the House with a few details here with my 18 years of experience as a former RCMP officer. One of the things in my training involved the participation in a riot as part of a tactical troop. Some of the general public call it the riot squad.

What I am hearing from the opposition could not be further from the truth. It is about trying to protect the civil rights of individuals, when they demonstrate, and ensuring the public peace is upheld.

During riots or civil protests, it is appalling to watch the behaviour of certain individuals, when they are trying to promote or instigate a full out riot, and where individuals are being set up, at the expense of others, for harsh punishment or harsh injuries.

The bill, which was put forward by my colleague, the member for Wild Rose, would make it an offence to wear a mask or to otherwise conceal or disguise one's identity during riots and other unlawful assemblies.

The provisions of the bill are necessary. One might even say they are overdue, as recent events have shown. In the space of just over a year, two large cities in Canada have been the sites of major riots.

Destruction of public property was widespread when anarchists descended on Toronto, using the cover of a peaceful protest during the G20 meetings, to shatter windows, clash with police officers, and threaten innocent bystanders, even news reporters and photographers in their path. Fires burned in the streets and black smoke billowed over the skyline.

Thugs used the excuse of the Vancouver Canucks loss in the seventh game of the Stanley Cup finals to wreak havoc in that city. Police cars were overturned and businesses were broken into and

looted. Canadians were heartbroken and horrified to see such mayhem in their country. It is sadly ironic that something as un-Canadian as a violent riot could happen in the wake of the most Canadian of activities, a hockey game of all things.

These riots were also an international black eye for Canada, a nation that is admired as a world leader for peace, order and safety.

These riots started in different cities under different circumstances. However, in both cities much of the violence and looting was carried out by people who concealed their faces with gas masks, bandanas, balaclavas, even hockey jerseys pulled over their noses. Other materials were used to conceal the many faces of the rioters and looters. I believe this is cowardly and the thugs knew exactly what the consequences of their criminality would be.

For the most part, these are not the actions of exuberant or inebriated people simply caught up in the moment. These were calculated efforts by people intent on criminal behaviour in order to avoid prosecution. Leaving themselves anonymous, these hoodlums felt free to assault people, and destroy public and private property.

I remember watching these individuals on the news on television dress up and proceed to smash windows, and then try to flee the scene of the crime. With BlackBerrys and YouTube, innocent good citizens chased these people down, watched them undress to join the crowd again, caught in their black apparel. The Vancouver police are still working to identify some of these rioters and bring them to justice.

I do not fault the police for the time it has taken to trace these individuals because many investigations are very complex and the complexity of this is of huge magnitude to undertake. Rather, I sympathize with the enormous task ahead, as the police tries to identify and charge the perpetrators who, in many cases, had most of their identifying features covered up.

It cannot be easy for the investigators, I know, but members of the House could help make that task less onerous in the future. They could help through the simple act of supporting Bill C-309.

How would that help? It would help in a number of ways. Most importantly, it would help deter violence at such events from escalating in the first place.

• (1800)

In an era of cellphones, cameras and video, when every bystander has the potential to be a reporter, a law preventing people from disguising themselves would give many people a time to pause. The deterrence value alone is of great value for police trying to control a mob and ensure the public's safety is maintained.

I am not blind to the reality, having observed this myself. While deterring crime is the reason behind any piece of criminal legislation, we know there are those who have no respect for the law, no matter what the consequences.

Private Members' Business

Bill C-309 would give the police a valuable tool to deal with them. It would be another tool in their tool kit. In a riot or an unlawful assembly, law-abiding citizens should be eager to follow police instructions to disperse and clear the area for the sake of their own personal safety, and that safety is the utmost when police are at the scene. It defies common sense to believe that any persons ignoring orders to do so and who, in addition, are wearing a mask to conceal themselves are there for any good purpose, which brings me to a point of reflection.

I remember, through all my training, having to stand in a black jumpsuit, wearing a helmet, steel toe boots, gloves, shoulder protectors and a gas mask in the heat of the day and watching the perpetrators don the same apparel; the shoulder pads, motorcycle helmets, balaclavas and gas masks. They would try to grab members' shields as they were trying to protect innocent bystanders. They would try to antagonize bystanders to start a riot. It was hard for us to be on the other side and keep our temper and watch while the media was in the middle. All these thugs are doing is using the media for their own gain.

As things stand, unless the police witness a person committing an offence, they need to prove a high level of intent before they intervene, even when a person is wearing a disguise or otherwise hiding his or her identity, even in the midst of an all out riot. This state of affairs just does not make sense.

We have 11 police officers in this caucus. Police need to have the ability to diffuse riots, just not to react. That is reacting policing, not preventive policing.

Bill C-309 would unshackle police in such situations by making the very act of wearing a mask in a riot or an unlawful assembly an offence on its own. Police would be able to identify those individuals before a major casualty took place.

Simply put, when police are engaged in measures to control a riot or unlawful assembly, as defined under sections 65 and 66 of the Criminal Code, which this bill would amend, then wearing a facial covering without lawful excuse to do so would become an offence in itself. This provision would help police deal with these individuals for the offence of wearing a mask rather than waiting to witness them commit a separate offence that could harm persons or property before they can take action.

This bill is pre-emptive in a sense that police could use their discretion to arrest or detain people who keep their faces concealed during a riot.

It is my hope that the penalties in the bill would first and foremost deter people from participating in a riot or unlawful assembly in the first place. However, for those who still choose to riot despite the consequences, police would have a new tool in their tool kit to help them control these volatile situations.

The Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees Canadians the freedom of peaceful assembly, which includes peaceful protests, and law enforcement officers understand this. They want to ensure that all people have the right to protest but, utmost, to get rid of the thugs who are causing the problems in the protests. Let those who want to demonstrate do so, but do so peacefully.

I have heard some people say that they worry that this will infringe upon that freedom. Nothing could be further from the truth. Having witnessed this myself first-hand, the police are there just to maintain and ensure that the protestors are safe. This bill deals only with individuals in a riot or an unlawful assembly situation. It is obvious that peaceful assembly has left the building at this point.

• (1805)

Far from violating the Charter of Rights, the bill would help protect peaceful protestors by allowing police to identify those in the mix who intend to commit crimes. I find that interesting. I remember one incident where one masked protester was running back and forth trying to escalate the event.

I hope that, for the safety of the general public, members will consider Bill C-309 as it would give people the right to honestly and protectively protest in peace. I urge the House to consider Bill C-309.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to say a few words about Bill C-309, which is a private member's bill and not a government bill. We keep seeing more of these bills from the opposite side where everybody decides that they want to have a crack at the Criminal Code because, for some reason or another, the Criminal Code is inadequate to handle crime.

I have a copy of the Criminal Code here and it is a very heavy document. It is about three inches thick and it has a lot of crimes in it and yet there do not seem to be enough crimes for the members opposite so we need to add more.

I have heard the members opposite say that there was no proof that the long gun registry prevented one crime. I understand the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety says that is "true, true, true", but I do not agree with her. I invite her to look at the alternative title. This act may be cited as the preventing persons from concealing their identity during riots and unlawful assembly act. So, by making it a crime to wear a mask during a riot, that would actually prevent it from happening. Of course it will not prevent it from happening. It would punish it by making it an additional criminal offence. Somehow, knowing where guns are, having a system that keeps track of them and prevents people from selling them willy-nilly, as in the gun registry, for example, does not prevent a single crime and does not prevent guns from getting into the wrong hands, but yet making something a crime by this bill is preventing crime.

As I say, this is a private member's bill and private members are entitled to bring whatever pieces of legislation they want. However, that also means that we need to have a good look at it.

The Criminal Code is called a code for a reason. It is a complex, interwoven series of bills brought together over time. I think the first Criminal Code in Canada was introduced in 1892 in an attempt to codify the criminal law. There have been changes made over time but it is really something that governments, not private members, should do because it is criminal law. It is a very serious matter. In this case, if this law were passed, it could make somebody liable to imprisonment for five years for being at an unlawful assembly with a mask.

Adjournment Proceedings

It always worries me when private members start delving into the Criminal Code and looking for new offences, because they do not always read the entire Criminal Code, and I do not expect them to, so they may not know what else is in the Criminal Code. Some lawyers know perhaps a little more than some people. However, I need to point out to hon. members that it is already an offence to wear a mask with the intent to commit an indictable offence. There is already a substantive section of the Criminal Code that says a person cannot wear a mask with the intent to commit an indictable offence. It is subsection 351(2).

What are we doing creating new offences? Why are we doing that? If there is a need to charge somebody for wearing a mask with intent to commit an indictable offence, and rioting is considered an indictable offence, then the tool is already there. We need to be very careful about assemblies, whether they are lawful or unlawful and when they become unlawful and what is considered unlawful, because nobody supports rioting.

• (1810)

The last time I looked at the Criminal Code, smashing windows, whether one is wearing a mask or not, is a criminal offence. Burning police cars is a criminal offence. The fact that someone wears a mask is an additional criminal offence, already.

The kind of remarks we get from members opposite is that we like the idea of people burning police cars. This is the kind of talk that makes people wonder what those fellows do with their time. Do they think we like rioters? No. We have the same feelings about people taking that kind of action as they do. Those members do not have a monopoly on feeling terrible when somebody does something like that, destroying property, or police cars or starting fires. No citizen of the country enjoys that.

The member talked about the G20 in Toronto. He did not talk about the law-abiding citizens who were arrested and herded into police custody, or the tourists who happened to show up with their children and were arrested. He did not talk about the proper understanding of how crowds could be controlled.

We have to be very careful about passing laws willy-nilly on issues that are already handled by the existing Criminal Code.

The members cannot come in here, be heroes and say that they are disgusted with rioters, so they want to have a new crime on the books. It is already a crime to engage in a riot. If we look at the definition of a riot, it does not take very much to allow a police officer to arrest somebody. Not only that, there is already a provision in the Criminal Code that makes it an indictable offence to wear a mask with the intent of committing a criminal offence. People do not even have to commit a criminal offence, they just need to have the intent to commit a criminal offence. Rioting is an indictable offence.

We have to be careful when we start taking the Criminal Code, adding sections, increasing penalties and so on. It does not serve to prevent things from happening.

Nevertheless members opposite think they have come up with behaviour that disgusts people, like rioting, and that disgusts me as much as them, and they want to create a new crime. However, it is already against the law. It is already in the Criminal Code.

If the government and the Department of Justice looks at all of these things and says that somehow or other the law is inadequate and that it wants to refine it, it is something I think all members of Parliament would like to listen to and hear the justification for it.

However to stand and say "I am disgusted with rioters, therefore we should make the penalties harsher or add new penalties" when the Criminal Code already treats it as a crime, is using Parliament for the wrong purpose.

I respect the hon. member. I know he is sincere in what he says, but to suggest that this somehow will prevent these things from happening is a bit naive, particularly when it is already a criminal offence. I have a few cases here where individuals were arrested for wearing bandannas.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Why are you trying to protect criminals?

Mr. Jack Harris: Why am I trying to protect criminals, this is the kind of nonsense we hear, sometimes, from the members opposite. This is not about protecting criminals. This is about telling him that he should read the Criminal Code.

If they want to change the Criminal Code, they should read the one that is there first, not just come up with ideas that they think will go over big with the folks back home because they saw it on TV and they are disgusted, too. It is already against the law and the people who do that should be arrested and charged with the full force of the law. I do not have a problem with that. It is what should happen.

• (1815)

I heard the problem in Vancouver was that the police officers were not there in force ready to take on the challenge and did not pay attention to the signs. I am not criticizing them. That was a criticism made by somebody else.

However, people who commit crimes should clearly be arrested and given criminal charges, and we already have that in the Criminal Code.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

*Adjournment Proceedings**[Translation]*

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Tarik Brahmī (Saint-Jean, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on June 9, I asked the Minister of Finance to explain what the Canadian government was doing to show leadership in order to reduce growing household debt in Canada. Unfortunately, his response was limited to expressing a great deal of optimism, but he provided very few answers that were satisfactory to me or to Canadians in general. The main argument was that the economy was doing well. I do not think that relying on the economy and interest rates is a reasonable way to help taxpayers pay down their debts or stop going further into debt.

In Quebec, in the past 20 years, consumer debt has increased by 700%. According to Statistics Canada, increased debt since 1984 can be attributed to lower interest rates. That trend has been growing mainly since 2002.

Between 1984 and 2009, average household debt in Canada more than doubled. As a result, in 2011, the debt-to-after-tax income ratio for households in general is more than 148%. In other words, for every dollar earned, Canadian families owe roughly \$1.50 on average. Between 2007 and 2009, the debt-to-asset ratio rose to the highest level in 35 years.

What is clear is that the existing government measures have done nothing to reduce debt. On the contrary, low interest rates have contributed to the rising debt levels of Canadian families. That is unacceptable.

We know that social inequalities make the situation worse. Consider, for instance, the thousands of single-parent families whose monthly payments average over 40% of their income. This debt only increases with age, which is even more worrisome. Think of the thousands of households that are struggling just to pay the monthly balance on their bills. There are also people with low incomes living in neighbourhoods where the property values are increasing, so they are being forced to move, thereby isolating themselves.

Of course, education levels are a very important factor when it comes to debt. According to Statistics Canada, between 1999 and 2005, the debt levels of secondary school graduates increased on average by 55.8%. The NDP is not inventing these figures. These figures are from Statistics Canada. These are real, absolutely irrefutable figures. Unfortunately, the more one is educated, the more debt one tends to carry during that time.

The question is this: how can the government, which claims to care about the future of Canadians and our children, justify its inaction when it comes to the growing debt load of families?

As for pensioners, the median value of their mortgage or consumer debt is \$19,000. Of those who have debt, 17% owe over \$100,000. The situation gets worse as these people get older. There are some people who are still paying back their debts at the age of 70.

The question I would like to ask the government, once again, is this: what is it waiting for to introduce mechanisms to protect families against these unacceptable debt levels right now?

● (1820)

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to tell the hon. member for Saint-Jean that what we are waiting for is for the NDP to vote with us on the measures we have proposed to protect Canadians.

[English]

We clearly do not want Canadians overextended and that is why we are ensuring Canadians can make informed financial decisions. We are taking steps to improve financial literacy. We introduced credit cards reforms to ensure Canadians had the information they needed. We cut taxes and created the tax-free savings account to encourage Canadians to save for their future. We strengthened mortgage rules to protect Canadians buying homes.

We also constantly monitor the housing market, ready to take steps to ensure its ongoing stability. That is why we took prudent and sensible action to strengthen Canada's housing market earlier this year by reducing the maximum mortgage period to 30 years, significantly reducing interest payments Canadian families would have to make on their mortgages. We also lowered the maximum amount lenders could provide when refinancing mortgages to 85%. Withdrawing taxpayer backing on home equity lines of credit provided by lenders was also an advantage. Our sensible measures will help sustain the housing market and economic recovery.

Moreover, our Conservative government also recognizes that the best way to support the economic well-being of Canadians is ensuring we have a strong and growing economy through more trade and lower taxes.

[Translation]

While our Conservative government is focusing on creating jobs and growing the economy with its low-tax plan, the NDP is publicly calling for tax hikes, which would take a larger share of Canadians' hard-earned money.

We know that the NDP wants to impose job-killing tax hikes on Canadian employers to the tune of \$10 billion during a time of global economic turbulence.

NDP members publicly attacked our Conservative government because it reduced the GST from 7% to 5%. They bemoaned the fact that Canadian families were keeping more of their own hard-earned money.

Listen to what the NDP said about this. The member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques said that cutting the GST was probably the worst measure that this government could have adopted. The NDP member for Beauport—Limoilou said that reducing the GST was a serious problem and that reducing the tax burden meant that the government would lose a significant part of its tax revenues.

The NDP plan is clear: higher taxes and irresponsible spending.

Adjournment Proceedings

Canadians and our economy cannot afford the NDP's job-killing economic plan. The NDP's high-tax plan is yet another disturbing indication that the NDP is not fit to govern.

In conclusion, I would like to mention that the NDP has just returned from Washington, where it made proposals that will kill jobs here in Canada, where hundreds of thousands of people are employed in the oil sands. That is deplorable. I urge my colleague opposite to support our plans to keep taxes very low in order to allow Canadian families to pay their expenses.

• (1825)

Mr. Tarik Brahmi: Mr. Speaker, all I can say is that, as usual with the Conservative government, the answer missed the mark.

I heard the parliamentary secretary's arguments, but the question was not about the NDP. She told us what the NDP has said; it is not about that. We are talking about the government, and the NDP is not currently in government.

The parliamentary secretary spoke about TFSAs. However, when people do not even have the means to pay their debts, how can they invest or save money? As usual, the government did not answer the question. She talked about creating jobs, but this government is creating low-quality, low-level, low-paying jobs that do not allow Canadian families to pay their debts.

Once again, the question is not about the government's criticisms of the NDP, but about what the government will do, now that it is in control and has the power, to reduce the debt burden of Canadian families.

[English]

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Mr. Speaker, once again, the NDP is missing the entire premise of the next phase of Canada's economic action plan. This is a low tax plan, for jobs and growth. This is the plan that will continue on the vein that we started to reduce taxes that Canadian families are paying so that they have more money to spend on the things that matter to them, the things that they need, the things that keep them thriving and keep them safe and sound in their home communities.

I want to mention that the member referenced the certified general accountant's report last June in his original question, but I am not sure he read it completely, or at all. If he did, he would have read what the report said about the ways to improve the state of household finances, especially a pro-trade agenda, not the anti-trade NDP agenda.

I am going to read from that report:

International competitiveness is becoming critically important for the success of Canadian business and, consequently... growth of individual investment incomes.

I would remind the NDP how important trade is to this exporting country. The NDP has to stop this anti-trade, anti-Canada agenda.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Just a reminder to hon. members that during the adjournment proceedings debate, they are welcome to take any seat in the chamber that they choose. It is not necessary to speak from the same seat that you usually take in normal proceedings.

[Translation]

CANADA POST

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since it came to office, the Conservative government has considerably weakened the federal government's ability to ensure that Canadians receive quality public services by making draconian cuts in its budget. In October, the government continued along the same path by irresponsibly cutting the working hours of the country's rural post offices. Not content with interfering in the postal workers' fundamental right to free collective bargaining by ordering them back to work last June, the government is now cutting their hours of work. This policy of fiscal restraint will have a significant impact on the quality of rural postal services across the country and on the quality of life of postal workers.

But the effects will be felt in Quebec, which has clearly been targeted by the government. According to figures obtained by the Canadian Postmasters and Assistants Association, as of October 2011 approximately 165,000 hours of work had been cut in all rural post offices in Canada. Of this, more than 95,000 hours were cut in Quebec alone. Even though Quebec has approximately 24% of the Canadian population, the cuts in Quebec represent nearly 60% of the hours cut in Canada. And that is just the beginning. Other waves of cuts are expected in the coming months.

In recent weeks I have asked for explanations about the cuts targeting Quebec. The answers I was given were evasive. The government tells us that postal services are important and that it cares about protecting rural communities. It even had the audacity to tell us that postal services are guaranteed in all regions, without discrimination. These vague answers show at least one thing: there is no argument to justify the unfair treatment of Quebec on this issue.

Canada Post's responses are no more satisfying. According to Canada Post, cuts in Quebec are justified by the fact that the province supposedly experienced fewer cuts than the rest of Canada in the past few years. We have tried unsuccessfully to obtain the relevant statistics to verify this statement but they are considered to be confidential information. For now, it is difficult to believe Canada Post's explanations, particularly since, according to the statistics we do have, Quebec also experienced significant cuts in 2008, 2009 and 2010.

I would like to end on an intriguing point. I am talking here about the lack of consistency between what the Conservative government says and what it does. During the last election campaign, the Conservatives played the "power to the regions" card by promising, among other things, to create jobs in the regions. During that election campaign, the hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable said that the Conservative Party would ensure that the regions finally had a voice in Ottawa. I do not know what strategy the government intends to use to create jobs but cutting the hours of postal workers in rural areas seems to be a peculiar way of trying to achieve that goal.

The hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable was certainly right about one thing: the regions do have a voice in Ottawa but it is thanks to our party that they do.

Adjournment Proceedings

● (1830)

[English]

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member's opening comments. I would like to remind the member that it is this government that created 600,000 jobs since the start of the global recession. It is this government that is creating jobs. It has policies to continue creating jobs. Canada continues to outperform all our equal trading partners.

For the member to criticize this government for our job creation policies is very rich especially considering the fact that his party, the NDP, moved to stop Canada Post from returning to delivering mail this past spring in a historic and terrible filibuster which not only affected Canada Post, but also affected our economy.

It embarked on a policy that not only affected Canada Post, but also damaged the Canadian economy in a fragile recovery. That is quite irresponsible of the other party. The delineation between the opposition and the government is quite clear for people who are watching this evening. The government creates jobs and implements policies to improve job creation. It ensures that fundamental components of our economy like postal delivery occur. The opposition party would like to stop postal delivery as demonstrated this past spring and has caused a lot of damage to the economy.

Canada Post has an obligation to provide affordable postal services to the people of Canada, not just for the foreseeable future, but for decades to come. Canada Post's immediate challenges have been well documented. Mail volumes have fallen by 17% per address since 2006 and the company is struggling with a huge pension solvency deficit of \$3.2 billion.

It is no secret that many of the challenges Canada Post faces include: declining letter mail volume due to Internet substitution, high cost of maintaining a network to service all Canadians, rising labour costs, huge pension obligations, threat from rapid technological change and shifting customer habits.

As Canada Post is taking the necessary steps to ensure its future success, the corporation has invested \$2 billion to modernize the postal system and replace outdated technology and infrastructure. These investments will allow Canada Post to take advantage of upcoming retirements to reduce the size of its workforce through attrition. The company has also reduced its non-unionized workforce, composed mostly of managerial jobs at head office, by nearly 15% since 2008, as part of its broad cost control efforts.

We are committed to ensuring that Canada Post is economically viable. While Canada Post operates at arm's-length from the government, it has assured me it will honour any and all collective agreements through this modernization initiative.

Mail volumes are rapidly declining, revenue from retail post offices is dropping and fewer customers are making purchases through Canada Post. All this has caused peaks and valleys. Any change in work hours is purely the result of the economic realities.

I hope this helps the member opposite to understand the challenges Canada Post faces and the adjustments it is forced to make as the economy changes rapidly.

● (1835)

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: Mr. Speaker, it is clear the Minister of State for Transport is stuck in the past. He always wants to discuss matters that occurred in June. I am talking about the cuts that are happening now and that are going to happen in the future.

[Translation]

The minister demonstrated on a number of occasions that he is not familiar with his own portfolio. He would rather talk in ideological terms than really get to know his portfolio and give real reasons for the cuts. The facts remain that the hours have been reduced and that Canada Post is making a profit.

[English]

Of course there are declines in service. When hours are cut and post offices are inaccessible, of course people will not be able to use the services that are inside the post offices. It is a bit rich for the government to argue that people are using the postal services less when Canada Post is making it harder and harder to use these postal services.

The post office in rural communities is an institution. It is something that links the community together. We can talk about modernization schemes, but the fact remains that people in rural communities love their post offices. The government is menacing them in trying to get rid of post offices by using strategies such as cutting hours and making services difficult to acquire.

I would like to end on the note that I have not really heard any real responses from the government side and I hope that the Minister of State will study his dossiers better.

Hon. Steven Fletcher: Mr. Speaker, the member needs to understand the bigger picture. He is not up to date on the file. It is he and his party who are hypocritical on the issue.

What happened in the spring is relevant because it accelerated the decline in mail volume. It accelerated the challenges that Canada Post faces because more people and companies shifted to email and e-commerce. That is why in areas such as Quebec and elsewhere throughout the country Canada Post had to adjust its hours.

The NDP needs to understand that when a decision is made there is a long-term effect. It does not just affect the present. That is why the government is good for the people of Canada and why the NDP is not prepared to govern. It is not ready for prime time and Canada Post is a prime example.

● (1840)

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it has been 59 days since the MV *Miner* landed on the shores of Nova Scotia on Scatarie Island. It has been about a month since I stood in the House and put a question to the Minister of Transport, which is why we find ourselves here tonight with the Minister of State for Transport.

Adjournment Proceedings

Over the four minutes that we have allocated during adjournment proceedings, I would like to ask the minister two questions.

The first question is with respect to the liability surrounding the MV *Miner*. Who is responsible for the removal of it?

Federal officials from the Department of Transport and the Coast Guard have said that they believe their responsibilities have been fulfilled. When I asked the question in the House, that was certainly the approach that the minister had taken in response to my question.

I also want to thank the Minister of State for taking the time to meet with the delegation that came up from Cape Breton, Premier Dexter and two MLAs, Geoff MacLellan and Alfie MacLeod. There was an indication given that there may be room for the federal government to help.

Time is of the essence. The frustration here revolves around determining who is responsible so that whoever that is can start working toward a plan.

If the federal government is not responsible, it is important that the premier knows that so he can start drafting a plan and determine where the federal government can help out.

I would ask the Minister of State to identify that.

The second question is with respect to the regulations. We know that the regulations are far too loose. Certainly, when we were in power we did not address this. Obviously, a case such as this really flags the issue of the loose regulations around towing.

The federal government licensed, permitted and set the regulations for towing the ship up through the Great Lakes. Once it was out in the ocean, it landed on the shores of Nova Scotia because a line was cut. It became Nova Scotia's responsibility. However, throughout that event, the process was a federal responsibility.

It is not uncommon in this salvage industry for people to get together and form a numbered company, bid on a job, pick up the wrecked ship and tow it to a salvage yard, at which point it is insured. Once it is cut loose and ends up on the bottom of the ocean under 300 or 400 feet of water, it becomes an insurance issue and the insurance money is collected.

Unfortunately for the salvage company, this time it did not go to the bottom of the ocean. Rather, it landed on the shores of Nova Scotia. Therefore, I believe that Nova Scotia will be faced with cleaning up this wreck, which some people are saying will cost \$24 million.

My first question for the Minister of State is quite straightforward. Who has the bottom line jurisdiction responsible for cleaning up this particular wreck? The second is, will the government move forward on tightening up the regulations with respect to the salvaging of abandoned ships?

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for raising this issue. He is correct that we had a very thoughtful and thorough discussion with the premier of Nova Scotia and members of the opposition party in Nova Scotia. I would like to use this opportunity to thank the premier of Nova Scotia for meeting with me. I was meeting with

him on behalf of the Minister of Transport who was doing important work in Montreal.

The quick answer to the question is that the person or entity that is responsible is the owner of the vessel.

The second part of the question was whether or not we are going to look at what to do in future cases. I think that is definitely something that we need to do.

Let me elaborate a little more. The mandate of Transport Canada is to promote safety in marine transportation and to protect the marine environment from damage due to navigation and shipping activities. In the case of the MV *Miner*, Transport Canada is investigating the incident to determine if there was compliance with legislation and regulations under the authority of the Minister of the Transport.

The owner of the vessel is responsible, as I mentioned, for its movements, including removal from a place that is not the property of the vessel's owner if it becomes stranded or wrecked. In the case where the vessel's owner is not known, a person designated by the Minister of Transport could act as receiver of the wreck to protect the owner's interests and to deal with any salvage or property claims that may arise. In this case, however, the owner is known and, as such, is responsible for the removal of the vessel. Therefore, it is the owner's responsibility.

It is Transport Canada's understanding that in the early stages, a tug company made several unsuccessful attempts to move the vessel from the beach. The owner contracted a salvage company to remove some of the pollutants, and the Canadian Coast Guard removed the remaining pollutants.

Since being notified of the grounding of the MV *Miner* on September 20, 2011, Transport Canada, the Canadian Coast Guard, and Environment Canada staff have been working collaboratively, in consultation with the provincial representatives, to address the respective federal responsibilities related to this incident. Transport Canada and the Coast Guard are in regular contact with the Government of Nova Scotia to make sure that there is thorough communication and that expert advice and opinions are provided where possible.

Transport Canada's national aerial surveillance program has been conducting regular over-flights to monitor the vessel and identify any marine pollutants from it. The Coast Guard is involved. We are also providing advice to the province, including issuing a safety advisory through local media and the Canadian Coast Guard to alert people of the dangers from this vessel. We have also provided advice to the province on the removal of the material from the vessel.

I know I am running out of time. Perhaps I will use my second minute to answer any more questions that the member has on this important issue.

• (1845)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I enjoy adjournment proceedings because there is actually an opportunity to get an answer. The minister has provided an answer, although I like his second answer more than his first, the fact that the regulations are going to have to be changed.

Let me ask a supplemental question then, because what I drew from his answer was that the federal government believes that this is a case between the Province of Nova Scotia and the owner. If the owner does not have adequate insurance, if the owner is a shell company and we are chasing ghosts, that is a whole other matter. However, we have to get to the nub of the issue and who is responsible for what.

Does he believe that it is between the Province of Nova Scotia and the owner? That is what I drew from his initial response.

Hon. Steven Fletcher: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for the opportunity to discuss this.

In regard to Transport Canada's involvement, it is investigating the incident for compliance with legislation and regulations under the authority of the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities. The investigation involves both the MV *Miner* and the tug *Hellas*, which was towing the MV *Miner* at the time the incident occurred.

Adjournment Proceedings

Transport Canada is also assisting the Canadian Coast Guard, the lead agency dealing with the threat of pollutants. Of course, we are dealing with marine expertise from all levels of government, across government. Transport Canada is also using aerial surveillance to keep an eye on the situation. We are looking at legal recourse and that is under investigation at present.

I look forward to working with this member and the Province of Nova Scotia on the second part of the member's question, which deals with what to do on a go-forward basis in this type of situation.

● (1850)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:51 p.m.)

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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Friday, November 18, 2011

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, November 18, 2011

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

MARKETING FREEDOM FOR GRAIN FARMERS ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-18, An Act to reorganize the Canadian Wheat Board and to make consequential and related amendments to certain Acts, as reported (with amendment) from the committee.

• (1005)

[*English*]

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Deputy Speaker: There are 11 motions in amendment standing on the notice paper for the report stage of Bill C-18. The motions will be grouped for debate as follows: Group No. 1 will include Motions Nos. 1 to 6; Group No. 2 will include Motions Nos. 7 to 11.

The voting patterns for the motions within each group are available at the table. The Chair will remind the House of each pattern at the time of voting.

MOTIONS IN AMENDMENT

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP) moved:

That Bill C-18 be amended by deleting Clause 2.

That Bill C-18 be amended by deleting Clause 3.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP) moved:

That Bill C-18 be amended by deleting Clause 6.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP) moved:

That Bill C-18 be amended by deleting Clause 7.

That Bill C-18 be amended by deleting Clause 9.

That Bill C-18 be amended by deleting Clause 12.

He said: Madam Speaker, I thank my seconder, the member for Sudbury, for reinforcing our opposition to this bill and helping us to move these amendments. I also want to recognize and extend my gratitude to the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands for doing her part to try to correct what we believe is an extremely flawed and even, may I say, dangerous piece of legislation.

I will begin my remarks by saying that I believe the entire process and the federal government's treatment of this bill has been a sham and a travesty from the word go. We are of the view that the fast-tracking of this bill does a disservice and an injustice to the very prairie farm producers whose livelihoods would be dramatically affected and impacted by this bill.

The public should know, if they are not already aware, that the extreme fast-tracking of this bill resulted in only two committee hearings of four hours each where not a single farmer was heard. There was no consultation, no co-operation, no accommodation of the reasonable concerns that have been brought forward by producers, farm organizations and people in the rural areas who would be affected by the loss of their shortline railways, the producer cars, and all the thousands of things that are impacted by abolishing the Canadian Wheat Board. None of them have been given voice and none of them have had the opportunity to be heard in the context of this debate.

I would caution the government that, when it does this habitually, this chronic, habitual abuse of parliamentary procedure, it threatens to undermine the very integrity of our parliamentary democracy. I have been here 14 years and I have never seen anything like it in my life. The government has lowered the bar and I am concerned that it is doing irreversible damage to the integrity of our parliamentary institutions.

I would remind the government that good governance is a fundamental prerequisite for prosperity. The government thinks that its ideas have primacy over all other Canadians' ideas, that no other voices need to be heard as it implements its agenda. It has a legitimate right to put forward legislation but it does not have a right to undermine, sabotage, diminish and erode the fragile construct that is the Canadian Parliament.

That is the frustration that we have on the opposition benches. The Conservatives represent a majority in the House of Commons but they do not represent a majority of Canadians. How can they be so arrogant as to assume that the other 60% of Canadians who did not vote for them and who maybe do not support their agenda do not have a right to be heard?

No one has a monopoly on good ideas. Canada in itself is a fragile construct. The Parliament of Canada is a manifestation of that co-operation that keeps this fragile federation together. The government is chipping away and eroding, and I honestly do not even think it realizes the damage it is doing.

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I will move to the motions that we have put forward today seeking to ameliorate and mitigate some of the impact of this bill. I will say from the beginning that I am sick and tired of the cutesy names that the government is inventing for all of its pieces of legislation. This bill is not about marketing freedom. It is about the freedom to sell grain for less.

With every one of its bills, the government makes up some editorialized comment and tries to put it off as the actual name of the bill. The real name of this bill is an act to reorganize the Canadian Wheat Board, but I believe it is an act to abolish the Canadian Wheat Board. Step by step, incrementally, the government is on this ideological crusade to abolish what we believe is a great Canadian institution, and one of those manifestations of a unique Canadian co-operation that is acting in the best interests of the producer instead of in the best interests of the big agrifood giants that will be the beneficiaries of this huge transfer of wealth.

The one thing we know about this bill is that it would take hundreds of millions of dollars out of the pockets of prairie farmers and put it into the pockets of the shareholders of the big agricorp and agrifood conglomerate giants that have been salivating over this market share ever since the Wheat Board was first created.

• (1010)

It is no surprise that Brian Mulroney is on the board of directors of Archer Daniels Midland, one of the big three that will gobble up this market share. He billed \$650,000 worth of billings in the last two years alone as a member of the board of directors. People do not get that kind of money just for attending board meetings. They get that kind of money for using their influence to push the government into something that is not in the best interests of farmers. It is in the best interests of a very special privileged few, and that is the Cargills, Viterra and the other agrifood giants.

An example of how the Conservatives are trampling on the democratic rights of prairie farmers and denying them the right to vote is that, by virtue of this bill, they will fire all 15 members of the board of directors, 10 of whom were elected by prairie farmers, and replace them with a board of four members appointed by the government. It is a \$6 billion a year corporation, one of the largest and most successful grain marketing companies in the world, and the Conservatives will appoint four of their stooges. I presume they have picked them out already. They are probably some failed Conservative candidates or some bagmen who did yeoman's due service to the political party of their choice—

• (1015)

Mr. Richard Harris: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. While I am sure that some will appreciate the theatrics of the hon. member's speech, referring to Canadians, who he does not even know, as "stooges", I find most offensive and he should apologize for that.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the member for his comment. I have not heard a personal attack directed to a specific person. It perhaps is not a very nice comment but I would not consider it unparliamentary in the context here that it is being raised.

Mr. Pat Martin: Madam Speaker, the first amendment that you read out today, seconded by my colleague from Sudbury, would delete clause 2, which proposes to reduce the board of directors from

15 down to 5, which would include a chairperson and a president. We think it is ridiculous. It is an appalling notion and we seek the support of all members of Parliament. If they have any kind of a commitment to good corporate governance, surely they would agree that the duly elected board members, elected by prairie farmers in the 10 districts, would be the better stewards of the Canadian Wheat Board in whatever manifestation is left after the bill undermines and guts it.

Clause 3, the second amendment we have put forward, is in a similar vein. It would delete clause 3 because it is undemocratic to change this. It would leave no direct input and say from prairie farmers into the operations of what remains as the shell of the Canadian Wheat Board.

I appreciate my colleague from Saanich—Gulf Islands participating in this debate today and moving meaningful, reasoned amendments. We encourage the Conservatives to at least entertain the fact that these are coming from a representative group that is larger than the group that they claim to represent. There are 60% of Canadians represented by the opposition members here. They did not vote for the Conservative Party. For the Conservatives to claim that the May 2, 2011, election gave them a mandate to run roughshod over democratic process and parliamentary procedure by fast-tracking the bill and denying the right of legitimate voices to be heard is, in and of itself, a travesty.

There is a reason that corrupt nations are poor. We should take a moment and reflect on some of the consequences of allowing our institutions to be eroded. I recently read a book by a former Liberal member of Parliament, Roy Cullen, called *The Poverty of Corrupt Nations*. It is hard to say which came first, if they are poor because they are corrupt or if they are corrupt because they are poor, but the two are inexorably linked. The Conservatives are taking us down a road where we are undermining not only our democratic institutions but the integrity of our Canadian democracy.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I did enjoy the member's remarks because I believe they are right on the money. He said in his earlier remarks that the government is threatening, with this action, the integrity of parliamentary institutions. The government has not threatened. It has hurt the integrity of this parliamentary institution because it went with a steamroller over section 47.1 of the current act and taken away farmers' right to vote in a legitimate plebiscite as it suggests in the act. The government has not only taken away farmers' votes, by the way it has handled committee as the member very well explained, but it has taken away farmers' voices.

Now we are finding out that the government, through executive order, and it has come out in the *Gazette*, is not only taking away farmers' votes and voices but it is now picking farmers' pockets by using their money in the contingency fund to offer a cushion for the new board. What does the member have to say about that?

• (1020)

Mr. Pat Martin: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Malpeque for his long-standing advocacy to stand up for the Canadian Wheat Board. It is time for all friends of the Canadian Wheat Board to stand up and make their views known because with a majority in the House of Commons and a majority in the Senate, it is going to fall to civil society to put some constraints on the government, from the absolute power it seems to be revelling in as we speak.

However, I agree with my colleague that it is offensive to the sensibilities of any person who calls himself or herself a democrat to observe what is taking place here, in denying farmers the direction and control over their own institution, and the pot of money now that the government seems to be grabbing and clawing back.

This institution was set up as essentially a big co-op, a co-operative to act in the best interests of prairie producers, to protect itself from the historic gouging of the robber barons, the rail barons and the great grain barons—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. There are many members standing up, so I would like to give the opportunity for a couple of other questions.

The hon. member for Fort McMurray—Athabasca.

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to ask this member a question. I did notice he talked about robber barons and I know he is doing the moustache thing. I have to tell him that his moustache looks quite the part as far as robber barons go. I do like the member. When we have the opportunity to speak, it is quite interesting.

However, I know he spends a lot of time on Salt Spring Island and I know there are not a lot of wheat farmers there. I know there are not a lot of wheat farmers in downtown Winnipeg. I do know there are a lot of wheat farmers in Alberta and Saskatchewan, and across the country who are represented by Conservatives. Most rural ridings that actually do grow wheat and actually have constituents in them that are farmers are represented by Conservatives. I know that and most people in Canada know that.

A survey was done of the younger generation of farmers. Because they are the future, 76% of that younger generation said they wanted something other than a monopoly. I want the member to answer this question. Why are the younger farmers saying, "Let's have something other than a monopoly"? Yet, the NDP and the Liberals are saying, "No, we want to violate what young farmers want". How does the member respond to that?

Mr. Pat Martin: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to raise a point that I meant to get to. I have heard from hundreds of prairie farmers from Saskatchewan, Alberta and Manitoba, many of whom said that they voted for the Conservative Party, but they did so with the knowledge that they were promised they would have a vote before anything happened to their Canadian Wheat Board.

Whether they voted for the Conservatives because of the gun registry or any number of other virtues and merits that were offered them by the Conservatives, they thought they were going to get to vote on the future of the Canadian Wheat Board. The government lied to prairie farmers to their face. We have it on record. We have

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the minister on record stating clearly that farmers would get to vote, that he believes in democracy. The Conservatives ignored all that and they are steamrolling this bill.

Mr. Richard Harris: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I believe that it is unparliamentary in this place to accuse anyone, any individual, or any party of lying. That is what the member just did. I demand he withdraw that.

• (1025)

Hon. Wayne Easter: Madam Speaker, I rise on the same point of order. What the member for Winnipeg Centre said is in fact true. The minister did, and I can find the quote if we have to find it, promise farmers a vote. He said that he believes in democracy.

Then, when it comes to introducing this bill, he is claiming that the vote was the election. That is not what he told farmers. I met with quite a number of young farmers in this town yesterday. They believed the minister. What the member for Winnipeg Centre is saying is the truth. The minister lied to those farmers.

The Deputy Speaker: On the same point of order, the hon. member for Fort McMurray—Athabasca.

I am coming very close to offer a decision, unless there is a new point to bring forward.

Mr. Brian Jean: Madam Speaker, clearly, that is unparliamentary. The member knows better than that. Also, he represents absolutely zero western farmers because he is from P.E.I. I do not even know why he is trying to represent farmers. I do not know why the other member from Winnipeg is trying to represent farmers. Neither of them represent farmers.

The Deputy Speaker: On the same point of order? Is there a new fact being brought forward by the hon. member for Nickel Belt?

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Yes, Madam Speaker. I want to inform the House that as hon. members we were elected to represent all Canadians, not just a fraction of Canadians. For the government side to accuse our member of lying when, Wednesday, these same members accused us of being traitors. That is highly hypocritical.

The Deputy Speaker: On the same point of order? Is there a new fact being raised by the hon. member for Cape Breton—Canso?

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Madam Speaker, I would like to build on that point, if I could. There is one member of Parliament in Atlantic Canada who does not have a fishing wharf in his riding and the government made him the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans. How can he represent fishermen with no fishermen in downtown Fredericton?

So, to say that members in this House who do not have wheat farmers cannot speak on behalf of wheat farmers is asinine. I would like to add that to the point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: On the points of order that have been raised by various members, I thank them for their comments because it is well-known that any language that causes disorder in the House is unparliamentary.

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I would ask all members of Parliament to moderate their language. Usually, when language is used, where an attack is made against one person, one minister, it is definitely considered unparliamentary. I would certainly ask that members who have made a personal attack on one minister to withdraw it.

However, I am going to, at this moment, ask all members to remember that this is a strong debate where there are equally strong differences in opinion and to be respectful in their criticisms of the actions of both government and the opposition. I will leave it at that.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Winnipeg Centre for seconding my amendments. I am also proud to have seconded his.

As we begin this discussion over the next 10 minutes of my portion of the debate, I want to concentrate on what our amendments are actually about and then address the larger issue of why I personally, as the member of Parliament for Saanich—Gulf Islands where we actually do have some wheat farmers, very small levels of crops at this point, but there are people in Saanich—Gulf Islands—

Hon. Vic Toews: How many under the Wheat Board?

Ms. Elizabeth May: I am sorry, I am unable to answer the hon. minister across the way as I explain our amendments.

We have put forward amendments to Bill C-18 that deal very specifically with changes to the sections of the bill that relate to the election of the board of directors.

It has been part of the Wheat Board ever since it was created in 1935 that the members of the Wheat Board's board of directors were primarily elected by farmers. It has been a 15 member board of directors, 10 board members elected by farmers, who themselves then are represented in a single desk marketing system, which is of course to the benefit of farmers, and that is why they were electing their board of directors.

The amendments we are putting forward at report stage of Bill C-18 are to revert control over the board of directors to the Canadian Wheat Board in whatever new position it is able to exert itself after passage of this legislation in order to ensure that it has representation elected by farmers.

The bill, as currently drafted, would eliminate board members elected by farmers and move to a five person board, all appointed through the governor in council, and of course the governor in council is essentially the cabinet, so it would remove the democratically elected portion of the board of directors, and that is a very serious matter.

I would love to take the temperature down on this matter this morning in the House. It is not an issue which is often debated in the House where it is somehow freedom versus oppression, or that there is this dreadful oppression from the Wheat Board and that all farmers wish to be freed from these shackles, from this terrible yoke.

The wheat and barley farmers in this country are clearly divided on the pros and cons of the Wheat Board in 2011. Clearly, we need to think about modernizing. Initially, the Wheat Board was created before 1935, which is the date we usually choose because that is

when it came out in statute federally. Going back to the 1920s, farmers first formed co-operatives. They had every reason to be concerned. When my hon. friend from Winnipeg Centre referred to the robber barons, he was referring to those of the early part of the 20th century. Farmers had every reason to be concerned about whether they could they get a fair price.

When farmers were put in a circumstance of being at the mercy of large corporate buyers, what would that mean? Farmers were competing against other. Each one would lower their price to get the sale with the big conglomerate, and in that situation it was a buyer's market. It could pick off the farmers. Farmers could go bankrupt if they kept reducing their prices to get the deal. That is why co-operatives were formed. That is why the Wheat Board was formed in 1935 to ensure that, with single desk marketing, the Wheat Board would buy and guarantee the farmers a liveable price for the wheat and barley they grew.

It is not easy being a farmer in this country. Goodness only knows that the average farmer in this country is unable to make a living on the farm. Most of the income, increasingly, has to be made off the farm, and that applies not just to grain farmers, of course, but to farmers of fruit, vegetables and livestock.

Being a farmer in this country is difficult. We need a food strategy. We need to support our farmers. We need to support locally grown food. In this context, eliminating the Wheat Board is highly controversial.

We have large conglomerates today, and my hon. friend referred to one of them, Viterra, and there is Cargill. They are in a good position if farmers do go back to what happened in the early 1900s, competing against each other to get a price from a big buyer. That is why there is so much concern from farmers who want to keep the Wheat Board, that they will be exposed to the vagaries of a marketplace in which competition means undercutting each other.

● (1030)

The heart of the co-operative movement was to support each other so that through collaborative efforts, whether in the fisheries, grain farming or in milk and dairy products, farmers could get a fair and livable wage out of a very competitive marketplace. Therefore, it is not without its controversy.

The one vote that the Wheat Board undertook showed 62% of farmers wanted to keep it. That means a not insubstantial number of farmers want to do away with it. In fact, if the percentages are right, there are more farmers who want to do away with the Wheat Board than citizens who voted for the governing party in the last election. That is not a small group of people, so the farmers are divided on this.

This bill would have been better contemplated with respect to how to modernize the Wheat Board rather than how to destroy the single desk and expose the farmers who are so very concerned, as well as those who think the change would do them well.

No one really knows how this will go.

I did want to express concern because in the category of what we do not know are the costs. In terms of costs, we know that the Canadian Wheat Board has determined that an auditor will be brought in. The auditor winning the contract has been reported to be receiving between half a million and a million dollars to figure out employee severance costs, pension costs and the potential legal costs for breaking long-term contracts.

The analysis was carried out by the reputable accounting firm, KPMG. It concluded that the costs of eliminating the Wheat Board will be in the hundreds of millions of dollars. This cost of course will be paid by the taxpayers, but in whose interest is this really? Some critics have pointed out that essentially paying hundreds of millions of dollars should be seen as a disguised subsidy to the Cargills and the Viterras because they will be the beneficiaries of this change.

It is clearly not an easy issue. I have talked to many members on the government benches who have told me that some of their farmers are terrified of getting rid of the Wheat Board. It is generally reported that the younger farmers are more prepared to innovate and figure out how to do without it.

There is no question that the Wheat Board could do a much better job helping farmers who are growing organic grain, but doing a better job should have been the goal. Getting rid of single desk marketing is a radical and dramatic change from what farmers in barley and wheat have known for years. The division, and the fact that the majority of the wheat farmers who have expressed themselves on this issue want to keep the Wheat Board, should have injected some caution into how this legislation will move forward. It is the absence of caution that is so deeply concerning to the members on the opposition side of the House. We need to protect the interests of Canadian wheat and barley farmers.

I know that members on the government benches honestly believe that they are acting in the interests of their constituents who farm wheat and barley. We on the opposition benches honestly believe that there are huge risks in moving so dramatically.

It is interesting that the Conservative members use the word "conservative" to describe themselves. They are really very radical. They are making radical changes to our criminal justice system, to prairie farming, and across the board, particularly in immigration. I do not think they like the term that they are the radical party, but that is much more the essence and substance of the changes we are seeing.

Therefore, in putting forward these amendments we are asking for one dose of caution: please allow these amendments to go through. Allow the farmers in the country to continue to elect members of the Canadian Wheat Board to represent their interests. With board members elected democratically by farmers, we could continue to allow all voices in the agriculture community to be heard. We could try to find the mechanisms that protect the farmers, after Bill C-18

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passes, from the worst aspects of a competitive cutthroat market dominated by a handful of multinational corporations.

We must find a way to ensure that prairie farmers make a living wage and that they are not exposed to the kinds of practices that gave rise to the need for the Canadian Wheat Board in the first place.

I urge members opposite to consider these few amendments and to allow them to go through.

• (1035)

Hon. Wayne Easter: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. You and I had a little chat about words I used in a previous debate where I did use pretty strong language against the minister.

I will quote what the minister said in Minnedosa, Manitoba on March 15:

Until farmers make that change I'm not prepared to work arbitrarily. They are absolutely right to believe in democracy. I do, too.

That is what the minister said.

I will withdraw my remarks, but I leave it up to others to judge those comments because he did not allow a vote.

• (1040)

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member. Having withdrawn the comments, I consider the matter closed.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board.

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciated the member opposite's comments. She seems to be a little more rational than some of the other folks on the other side who have been bringing forward points that need to be considered here.

I am very glad to have folks from across Canada talk about these issues that affect western Canadian farmers, but I am not sure that she understands how much the communication issues have changed, the information issues have changed and the transportation issues have changed in western Canada since 1935. She seems to think that we still need a system that holds farmers in place and that they should know their place.

Does she understand the reality of how things have changed on the farms? Farmers are probably more often aware of information than even the grain companies themselves. Does she not think that is a good reason to give them their freedom to market their own grain and make their own business decisions?

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, as leader of the Green Party I have 305 candidates across the country and they represent the same areas that all the members in this House represent. The agricultural critic on the Green Party shadow cabinet, Kate Storey, and her husband are wheat farmers in Manitoba. They have informed me about what it is like for them to try to make a living as organic wheat farmers. They made that transition themselves.

Government Orders

I certainly am aware of how much has changed since 1935, but I believe that farmers should have the right to choose for themselves whether it is time to get rid of the Wheat Board and the single desk. In this instance, I think the government should have paid attention to the way the legislation was drafted and ensured that any decisions about getting rid of the single desk were based on a vote by the farmers. That is the freedom I think farmers want to have.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to bring a personal perspective to this debate. My grandfather, Vincent Varyu, who passed away in 1981, came to this country in 1926 from Hungary. He came pursuant to an immigration plan that encouraged farmers, particularly from Europe, to come to Canada. He landed in Halifax, took a train to the edge of Saskatchewan, walked 26 miles with his brother and came to a quarter section of land on the border of Saskatchewan and Alberta, near Dewberry, Alberta. The deal was that he would get that land if it was cleared within two years. He and his brother cleared that land by hand, got title to it and farmed it from 1926 until he retired in 1960.

My grandfather was a proud Conservative all of his life, but he was an absolute, avid and committed proponent of the Canadian Wheat Board. The reason, as he explained to me, was the protection it gave farmers. He said as a farmer he saw the protection that this board gave.

It is one thing to say that the Conservatives represent the rural ridings in western Canada, but again, those farmers may have voted Conservative on the understanding that they would have a vote on any attempt to get rid of the Canadian Wheat Board, which the Conservatives campaigned on. Did the Conservatives, during the campaign, tell the farmers that they would abolish the Canadian Wheat Board without a vote? Because that may have changed the perspective and opinions of those farmers. Many, like my grandfather, supported the Conservatives but did not want the Canadian Wheat Board to go.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, I hear from farmers on this issue because we have spoken out on it. I hear from farmers who want to keep the Wheat Board and I hear from farmers who do not. I hear from farmers who voted Conservative and believed they would have a vote in a plebiscite before the Wheat Board would be dismantled as a single desk system.

We also know that farmers desperately need better rail transit and better transportation routes. We need to think holistically about what farmers need. I do not believe they need Bill C-18.

• (1045)

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is great to be back to speak to the bill again.

I would like to inform the House and Canadians that farmers will have a choice. The opposition wants to give them a choice and we want to as well. They will have a choice between a voluntary wheat board, which the government is supporting, and their own decisions about marketing their own grain.

That is a good balance. That is the balance that the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands should be supporting. If the opposition were reasonable on this, it would support that as well.

I want to point out that the Conservative Party will not be supporting any of the amendments that have been moved by the opposition today. Unfortunately, as they did at committee, we believe opposition members are playing games with the future of the grain industry in western Canada, trying to delay this legislation and trying to create instability in western Canada.

I note that the member for Winnipeg Centre was complaining about committee and the times that were given to it. The reality is that he left early on two of the three nights and the third night we finished early because it was agreed that we had heard the witnesses and so could move on. It is interesting that he would complain about the committee process when he did not engage in a good part of it.

These amendments have been made to scuttle any—

Mr. Don Davies: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

I apologize for interrupting my hon. colleague's speech, but it is a parliamentary rule in the House not to comment on the absence of someone in the House. I wonder if that rule also applies to committee, because my hon. colleague just pointed out that someone was absent from committee. I may be mistaken, but I would like to raise that point and get your ruling, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member. It is not permitted to mention the presence or the absence of members.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board.

Mr. David Anderson: Madam Speaker, I hope I am not taking any time here, but I would not comment on the member's absence in the House. That is not what I was doing. I was talking about committee. I believe we are able to do that, but I stand to be corrected.

This argument probably will get stranger than even this morning when the Liberals speak. They have come up with some tinfoil hat conspiracy about the contingency fund, which is a very strange argument. The reality is the board asked us to increase the contingency fund.

The second reality is that the fund now needs to be protected from the present board of directors. It has already spent somewhere between \$60 million and \$100 million on ships that it did not tell farmers it was buying. It appears it is spending several million dollars on an advertising campaign in eastern Canada for which I and other western Canadian farmers have to pay. Certainly anything to do with a contingency fund with regard to the government's action would be to protect that for farmers, for taxpayers and for the future of the Canadian Wheat Board.

At committee, unlike the opposition, the Conservative Party, led by the member for Prince Albert, put forward two constructive amendments which were passed. We believe the House of Commons committee has done its job and we are very happy to be here this morning to support marketing freedom for western Canadian farmers.

I want to talk one more time about my experiences with this system. It is a bit frustrating to only have 10 minutes because I do not know if I can do a good job on this in that time.

I have lived on a farm my whole life. In my teenage years I started farming. We had to deal with the Wheat Board. In the early 1990s, we had a crop that froze in the fields. When we came to market it, the board said that it was not willing to market that grain because it did not find it to be good quality.

We were able to go to the United States to find a buyer for it. At that time, if one had the permission of the board, one could export. However, when we went to export it, the grain company came back and said that it would not take our grain because it already had a supply of grain. It turned out that it had made a deal with the Wheat Board, at the time the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, for our grain. Therefore, we received about 65¢ a bushel less for it than we had arranged with the U.S. grain company. We did get to follow the trucks from our own local grain elevator to the U.S. grain elevator to get that 65¢ less a bushel for each bushel of grain that was hauled from there.

That is really when attitudes in our part of the world began to coalesce and people realize they can do a better job of marketing than the Canadian Wheat Board.

The board lives off farmers. The board does not make its own money. Any money that it makes and any money that it spends is farmers' income. As the expenses at the board have increased over the years, farmers have become more and more concerned about how their money has been spent.

The member for Saanich—Gulf Islands said that this was not an issue of freedom versus oppression. However, for many farmers it is because they feel the board has bullied them for decades, and it has not stopped.

We can probably witness the bizarre scene, where apparently the board of directors now spends farmers' money to hand out muffins and CWB leaflets at Union Station in downtown Toronto to try to appeal to some folks in Toronto. It has been taking out full-page ads in eastern Ontario papers, on TV and on radio. I get to pay for that. It is a very strange situation. It is probably one more clear illustration as to why western Canadian farmers need freedom. If these folks want to spend money like this, they should spend their own money, not our money.

I grow my own wheat and pay the expenses when I grow it. Farmers harvest their own grain and store it. However, when it comes to selling it, we are not allowed to do that. I want to explain to Canadians what we need to do just to sell our own product.

We have to go to the Canadian Wheat Board and ask if it will sell our grain. It comes back and offers us a contract that we sign. Then the board tells me what percentage of that contract it will take.

Government Orders

Typically it is 60% to 70% of the grain, but sometimes it is 100%. The board tells me that it will take that grain over the next 12 months, so I have to wait. It also tells me that it will pay me for part of it when I deliver and the rest will be paid in up to 18 months later.

I do not know if members have run a business, but it is impossible for people to make a living that way. Again, one of the opposition members mentioned that farmers have to go off-farm for income. This is one of the reasons why they have to do that. They do not even get paid for much of their own product until 18 months later.

There is a thing called a buy-back. I can go to the board and say that I would like to buy my own grain back, even though it is still sitting in my granary. The board will tell me what price I have to pay for my grain so I can try to make an arrangement for somebody else to sell it.

• (1050)

From personal experience, we have gone to them with a proposal. We had some durum a few years. The Wheat Board was only taking 60% of the durum. We found a buyer in the United States and the board had nothing to do with it. We went to the board and said that we wanted a buy back and it said that we would not get it at any price. It was contracting that percentage and we could not buy it back. That 40% of our product, our inventory, would sit in our bin until the Wheat Board was ready to take it and ready to say that we could sell it.

That is why western Canadian farmers know they need change and freedom. This is the freedom we want to bring for them. The freedom the Liberals and the NDP want for them is to keep them chained so they are dependent on other people and cannot make their own decisions. We are not prepared to go along with that.

There are a couple of illustrations of things that have worked in western Canada where people have had freedom.

Let me talk a bit about canola. It is a fairly recent development in western Canada. It now brings in almost \$5.6 billion to western Canada and is our largest value crop. One of the primary reasons for that is because farmers can go out and market their own grain. It has become the flagship product of our agricultural industry. I do not think we ever expected that. We have always been told that we are the heart of the grain world. Now another crop has passed grain in its value in western Canada.

Flax is a smaller crop and another Canadian success story. It is used in a whole host of products, from animal food to environmentally friendly flooring and those kinds of things. We are now one of the largest suppliers of flax in the world, producing almost half of the world's supply.

Government Orders

Mustard is grown in my area. It is another crop that has expanded in acres because farmers get out there and market their own crops.

I do not know if I need to talk about pulses and lentils, peas, lentils, chickpeas and what has happened with them over the last few years. There has been a multi-billion pulse and special crops industry that has developed in western Canada, primarily because people can grow it and they can market their own production.

The production of the eight major pulse and special crops have increased from a million tonnes in the early 1990s to 5.6 million tonnes in 2009, and that is at a time when grain has gone backward. When the acreage for grain has been diminishing each year, these other several crops have been increasing.

This is one of the reasons why we need freedom in western Canada, so we can free up the grain industry so it can begin to grow again. We have already heard there are at least two companies that want to build plants and begin processing in western Canada as soon as these changes are made.

I had to laugh when I heard the opposition say that it did not want processing plants in western Canada because that would mean they would pay less for their product. I have never heard such a strange argument in my life. If we really wanted to save money, I guess we should shut down every bit of processing and manufacturing in the country. That is just ridiculous.

We look forward to the \$500 million per year of extra revenue that this will generate in western Canada. Freedom cannot come too soon for farmers. They need the stability from this legislation. We need the legislation passed as quickly as possible so they can begin planning for next year, so we can begin to see our grain production grow once again in western Canada and have western Canada remain the heart of agriculture around the world.

●(1055)

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, much of the parliamentary secretary's speech is based on the same misinformation and propaganda that the Conservatives have been circulating across western Canada, taxpayer-funded misinformation and propaganda, while at the same time imposing a gag order on the directors of the Wheat Board so they cannot defend themselves and correct some of this misinformation.

One of those elements is this myth, this free market flight of fancy, that as soon as the government eliminates the Canadian Wheat Board, value-added mills will pop up out of the ground like mushrooms. In actual fact, for the last 10 years milling capacity has increased 50% under the current regime. Four new facilities have begun. The reason there is one hanging in the wings right now is because it is pretty sure it will be able to buy their grain for less, which means less money in the pockets of the prairie producer. The misinformation is reckless and irresponsible.

The \$500 million figure that he used is the estimate from KPMG as to what it will cost to wrap up the Canadian Wheat Board. Will the parliamentary secretary verify its studies affirm that it will cost the government \$500 million to realize this ideological—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. David Anderson: Madam Speaker, once again we hear that overheated rhetoric for which the member opposite is so famous. There is a word we believe in that starts with the letter "F" and that is the word "freedom".

I do not think he was listening. The \$500 million are \$500 million every year that western Canadian farmers will gain from finally being able to market their own grain, do their own production and conduct their own business.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have a short question for the parliamentary secretary and I would like a direct and honest answer.

He said in the beginning of his speech that farmers would be offered choice between the Canadian Wheat Board and other companies in the open market. What he did not say was that there was no longer the choice of single desk selling, and that is the key point. It is not about the Wheat Board, it is about the issue of single desk selling.

Will farmers have a choice between single desk selling and the open market, yes or no?

Mr. David Anderson: Madam Speaker, the problem with the member opposite is he does not know that we cannot give people freedom and imprison them at the same time. We certainly will bring them freedom and we will give them the choice to deal with a voluntary Canadian Wheat Board or to market their own grain.

I should point out that when farmers wanted freedom, his party locked farmers up in jail. I do not think Liberals will even admit this, but one of the farmers was put in jail with a convicted murderer and stripped searched 58 times because of the ideological bent those folks had toward keeping farmers imprisoned.

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to talk about choice in my constituency since the member from P.E.I. brought it up. My constituents who grow wheat do not have a choice. They have to sell to the Wheat Board. The farmers in northern British Columbia have to sell to the Wheat Board. Wheat farmers in the riding of the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands are in luck because they can sell it to whomever they want. If there are wheat farmers in the riding of the member from P.E.I., they can sell to whomever they want.

What do the constituents of the parliamentary secretary have to say? My constituents are clearly saying they want choice. They want freedom. In this case, all the constituents of the members who support the Wheat Board monopoly have a choice.

●(1100)

Mr. David Anderson: Madam Speaker, my colleague makes a great point. He has done great work on this issue.

As I pointed out earlier, for canola, flax, peas and specialty crops, we all have choice. Those markets are growing and expanding every day. What we really need is for this legislation to pass as quickly as possible because western Canadian wheat farmers need stability and they need to begin planning for next year. The opposition cannot be allowed to destabilize the farmers throughout the next growing season. We need the legislation passed immediately.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

MEDAL OF BRAVERY

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise in the House today to recognize and honour two outstanding police officers in my riding, Sergeant Delkie Curtis and Sergeant Roger Thomas of the Cobourg Police Service.

On October 28, 2011, sergeants Curtis and Thomas both received the Governor General's Medal of Bravery award. On October 6, 2007, sergeants Curtis and Thomas rushed into a smoke-filled building in Cobourg, Ontario and rescued an incapacitated woman from the burning building. Sergeants Curtis and Thomas acted swiftly and with complete disregard for their own safety. Their willingness to risk their own lives in order to save another's is an exceptional act of bravery in keeping with the highest standards of all Canadian police officers.

On behalf of the good people of Northumberland—Quinte West, I wish to thank sergeants Curtis and Thomas for their bravery and dedication to duty. These two men are truly deserving of the honour that was bestowed upon them for their courageous and selfless act.

* * *

BATTLE OF THE BLADES

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today, along with my colleague from Nickel Belt, to commemorate another great achievement by Sudbury native and Olympic gold medallist, Tessa Bonhomme.

On Monday night Tessa and skating partner David Pelletier were crowned the champions of the third season of CBC's *Battle of the Blades*.

The *Battle of the Blades* partners professional hockey players with professional figure skaters. Each week the pairs present a routine to the judges. Viewers then vote for their favourite performance.

Bonhomme, who won a gold medal as part of the Canadian women's hockey team at the 2010 Olympics, was the first female hockey player to take part in the show.

As the champions, Bonhomme and Pelletier won \$100,000 for the charity of their choice.

Since the show's inaugural season in 2009, *Battle of the Blades* has made nearly \$1 million in charitable donations to organizations in Canada, a truly remarkable figure. This year, Bonhomme has dedicated her prize to the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation CIBC Run for the Cure in my great riding of Sudbury.

Statements by Members

Congratulations to Tessa Bonhomme.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Madam Speaker, with our Tackling Violent Crime Act, measures to strengthen parole, pardons and sentences for violent criminals, funds for more front-line police and to prevent at-risk youth from a life of crime, only this Conservative government is making our communities and streets safer.

According to StatsCan's just released 2010 crime severity index, Windsor—Essex is the safest region in Canada. Among the safest Canadian communities over 10,000 people, the town of LaSalle ranks second, Tecumseh fourth, Kingsville seventh, Lakeshore eighth, and Essex twelfth. Windsor is the seventh safest big city of 32. Topping the list of 238 safest towns and cities is my hometown, Amherstburg.

Thanks to our dedicated police, strong community involvement, our government's investments to prevent crime and tough laws to crack down on criminals, Windsor—Essex is the safest region in Canada.

* * *

[Translation]

SIR JOHN A. MACDONALD

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to an immigrant who worked hard to build his country.

[English]

He had a long-term vision for a big Canada, the Canada we are fortunate to inherit. He believed the federal government should lead in realizing that vision. He worked for this vision by serving as the first occupant of the seat that I am now proud to occupy and as the first prime minister of Canada.

In 2015 we will celebrate the bicentennial of Sir John A. Macdonald. I thank Mr. Arthur Milnes and the Sir John A. Macdonald Bicentennial Commission in Kingston, Ontario for organizing the commemoration.

As the Minister of Finance said, "All eyes should be on Kingston on January 11, 2015". I thank him and Tory senators Mike Duffy and Linda Frum for their continuing support. As well, I thank the first person to lead a VIP Sir John A. tour in Kingston, the leader of the Liberal Party, the member for Toronto Centre.

Together, let us celebrate and honour our history.

Statements by Members

● (1105)

ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

Mr. Colin Mayes (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Madam Speaker, on November 12 of this year, St. John's Lutheran Church in Vernon in my riding of Okanagan—Shuswap celebrated its 100th anniversary; 100 years of programs for children, youth groups, marriage counselling, seniors' activities, as well as ministering to the spiritual needs of the people of Vernon.

It has been said that for democracy to survive it must be supported by a virtuous citizenry. It is also said that elected representatives are a reflection of the values of the citizens they represent.

Churches across Canada have contributed to our Canadian democracy by teaching the brotherhood of mankind the call to serve one another and the obligation of accountability to our creator.

I thank St. John's Lutheran Church in Vernon and all churches in Canada that have contributed to the important work of tending to the spiritual well-being of Canadians and moulding those values that are the foundation of Canadian life.

* * *

[Translation]

NEUVILLE AIRPORT

Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Madam Speaker, on November 7, 2011, after opposing this project for months, the Neuville municipal council was forced to announce to the public that an airport would be built in their municipality.

Although the people of Neuville have clearly spoken out against the construction of this airport, the Carriage by Air Act, which is federal legislation, gives small groups of developers the freedom to set up where they want, without consulting the municipality or the public. For a long time, the mayor has been calling for a meeting with the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, but the minister has refused, claiming that municipalities fall under provincial jurisdiction.

Is the minister so disconnected that he has forgotten the Supreme Court ruling confirming that federal legislation has authority over Quebec legislation when it comes to agricultural zoning? This ruling clearly shows that the minister is responsible for this issue.

It is time for him to take his job seriously and publicly commit to meeting with the mayor of Neuville.

* * *

[English]

RAYNE DENNIS SCHULTZ

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Madam Speaker, last week we spent time remembering the service and sacrifice of Canadians in uniform. One in particular struck a chord with me.

Group Captain Rayne Dennis "Joe" Schultz was an Alberta boy who joined the Royal Canadian Air Force in July 1940 and started a distinguished RCAF career that lasted 37 years.

During the war, Joe flew de Havilland Mosquitos in the night fighter role with one of my old squadrons, the 410 Cougars. He

finished the war as an ace with eight kills, including four in one night, which earned him and his navigator the Distinguished Flying Cross.

Known as "Mr. Flight Safety", his efforts were recognized by the Flight Safety Foundation and the United States Air Force Aerospace Safety Hall of Fame.

In Canada, he was awarded the Trans-Canada McKee Trophy in 1978. He was inducted into Canada's Aviation Hall of Fame in 1997.

Like many young aviators, I received the benefit of Joe's personal advice and had the privilege of knowing him for many years.

After a fighter pilot's struggle, Joe slipped the surly bonds of earth for the last time, appropriately on Remembrance Day 2011, in his 89th year.

Noctivaga, Joe.

* * *

MEDAL OF BRAVERY

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to pay tribute to Mr. Dale Brady from Valemount, B.C., who just received his second Medal of Bravery from the Governor General.

Dale Brady, chief pilot with Yellowhead Helicopters, and Steve Blake, visitor safety specialist with Parks Canada, rescued a group of hikers off Mount Robson in 2008 after they were reported overdue. These hikers had been on the mountain for three weeks when they found they could no longer continue. The chances of them surviving another night were very slim.

The rescue was extremely difficult as the weather at the top of the Canadian Rockies' highest peak was incredibly unstable. After getting a very small break in the weather, Brady and Blake headed to Mount Robson. Due to a steady hand and the experience of Mr. Brady, Mr. Blake was successfully lowered down from the helicopter and extracted the men off the side of the mountain.

Mr. Brady's courage and willingness to risk his own life to save another's is both admirable and extraordinary. His actions inspire a nation and command our deepest gratitude.

* * *

CHILD POVERTY

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Madam Speaker, November 20 is Universal Children's Day, commemorating the UN's adoption of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child in 1959, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989.

That same year this House voted unanimously to end child poverty. The motion was put forward by our former leader, Ed Broadbent.

Sadly, on this Universal Children's Day, Canadians are realizing that more and more children are slipping into poverty as their families suffer during the economic crisis.

That is why I want to echo the call of UNICEF and the Canadian Association of Social Workers who are celebrating today by calling once again for an independent children's commissioner.

The lack of movement on appointing a children's commissioner, first suggested in 2003, was highlighted by the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children in its report to the UN on Canada's progress.

A commissioner would be able to investigate government policies that discriminate against vulnerable groups, like aboriginal children, and measure the impact on children's rights of new legislation. In addition, a commissioner could tell us why, after 22 years, Canada still has made no progress on reducing child poverty.

* * *

• (1110)

[Translation]

NATIONAL CHILD DAY

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am rising today to bring attention to National Child Day, which will take place on Sunday, November 20.

[English]

We all have a role to play in ensuring that children reach their full potential as the future of our country.

Unlike the Liberals, the Conservative government has delivered real results to ensure that we are supporting Canadian children and families. In fact, we have made the largest investments in Canadian history.

This year alone, we will provide over \$6 billion in early childhood development and child care funding. We have also introduced the universal child care benefit, giving \$2.6 billion annually to 1.5 million families. We have implemented tax measures that have put more than \$3,000 back into the pockets of every Canadian family. This makes a real difference for Canadians in these tough economic times.

Our government values the important contribution that families make to our country to improve its well-being.

I encourage all Canadians to participate in National Child Day on November 20.

* * *

TRANSGENDER DAY OF REMEMBRANCE

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Madam Speaker, I stand today to recognize November 20, the Transgender Day of Remembrance. This is a day when people in communities across Canada and around the world gather to remember the victims of transphobic violence and to dedicate themselves to working to end all forms of discrimination against transgender and transsexual people.

The House will have an opportunity to take an important step toward ensuring full equality by including gender identity and gender expression as prohibited grounds of discrimination in the

Statements by Members

Canadian Human Rights Act when my private member's bill comes forward in the new year.

Other actions are needed to help end discrimination in the workplace, in housing, in health care, in the justice system, and in the provision of identity documents.

Let us remember that transgender and transsexual Canadians are members of our families. They are our neighbours. They are our co-workers. They are our friends. Canada is richer for their life experience and the many ways they contribute to our communities. On the Transgender Day of Remembrance, they also help us to understand our own humanity and the full meaning of equality.

New Democrats are honoured to stand in solidarity with transgender Canadians on this important day.

* * *

NATIONAL FLAG OF CANADA

Mr. John Carmichael (Don Valley West, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise today because later this afternoon we will be debating my private member's Bill C-288, the national flag of Canada act.

The bill is important because too many Canadians have been forced to take down their flag when they have been trying to show support and pride for this great country and the values in which we believe, Canadians like Mr. Vachon, the Cassidys, the Wittermans, and so many others like them. Later today I will be telling their stories.

These Canadians and so many more have stood up for our flag, our flag which represents freedom, democracy, courage and justice.

It is also time that we as members of Parliament stood up for our flag and all it represents by supporting these Canadians and so many more who have been treated unfairly for far too long.

I would ask all MPs in the House to join me and support Bill C-288.

* * *

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Madam Speaker, 25 years ago today, Ontario's legislative assembly passed the French Language Services Act, known in French as Loi 8. It guarantees an individual's right to receive services in French from Government of Ontario ministries and agencies in 25 designated areas throughout the province.

It would be impossible to mention this important anniversary without paying tribute to the work of Bernard Grandmaître, a good friend of mine, who was the Ontario government's minister responsible for francophone affairs at the time.

We should be thankful for the Peterson government's leadership and the influence this event had on other parts of the country with francophone minorities. In fact, since that time, other provinces such as Nova Scotia and Manitoba have passed laws or adopted policies similar to Ontario's French Language Services Act.

Oral Questions

Today we are celebrating this turning point in our country's francophone history. The French Language Services Act was a very important step in the positive evolution of Canada's linguistic duality.

* * *

• (1115)

[English]

COPTIC CHRISTIANS

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Madam Speaker, it has been confirmed that 29 Coptic Christians fell victim to acts of violence in Egypt yesterday while attempting to commemorate their brethren who fell as a result of violence during a peaceful demonstration on October 9.

Our government finds this violence in Egypt to be completely unacceptable. We passed a motion unanimously in the House calling for a transparent investigation into the violence and for those responsible to be held accountable.

We hear loud and clear the cries for support from Coptic Christians here and in Egypt.

On behalf of all Canadians, I offer our condolences to the families of the victims and to those whom they were commemorating.

Freedom of religion is a fundamental human right and a vital building block for healthy democracies. People of faith must be able to practise and worship in peace and security.

Once again in the House we will make it clear that discrimination and violence against the Coptic community must stop.

* * *

[Translation]

PAY EQUITY

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Madam Speaker, yesterday, female Canada Post workers won the battle for their fundamental right to pay equity. The government had been denying them that right for 28 years, spending millions of dollars on court costs to oppose women's rights. With the Liberals' help, in budget 2008, the Conservatives took away the hard-earned gains that had been made in the area of pay equity. They should be ashamed of themselves.

Despite the Conservatives' attempt to suppress the rights of female workers, Canada is moving forward, thanks largely to the contribution made by one of the members of this House. Today the entire NDP team would like to recognize the efforts of the leader of the official opposition and hon. member for Hull—Aylmer.

Despite constant attacks by the Conservatives, she worked tirelessly with PSAC to improve women's equality in Canada. Despite desperate attacks by the Conservatives, she will continue to fight for women's rights and the rights of all Canadian workers. Now that is Canadian leadership. The united NDP team and our party leader are building a better Canada together.

[English]

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Madam Speaker, this week, committee hearings began on the ending the long gun registry act. Rather than inviting law-abiding hunters, farmers and sports shooters to talk about how the long gun registry affects them personally, unsurprisingly, the NDP chose to invite its big union buddies, the Canadian Labour Congress, as its first witness. That is the same party that robbed residents of two northern Ontario ridings of their voice in this place by placing a gag order on MPs who dared to vote the wishes of their constituents.

While Canadians find this sort of behaviour upsetting, it should come as no surprise. After all, it is always special interests first and constituents last with the NDP.

Our government will continue to respect Canadian voters who gave us a strong mandate to end the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry once and for all. Giving the stage to big union bosses and silencing ordinary rural and northern Canadians is yet another worrying example that the disunited NDP is unfit to govern.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

JUSTICE

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier-Sainte-Marie, NDP): Madam Speaker, yesterday, the Conservatives finally decided to compromise a little and allow members of Parliament to do their work and examine the provisions of Bill C-10. The Minister of Justice even demonstrated flexibility by indicating to the Government of Quebec that it might be possible to reintroduce the amendments proposed by his Quebec counterpart.

Can the government confirm that it is prepared to amend its bill in order to focus on rehabilitation and social reintegration?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Madam Speaker, Canadians, including Quebecers, want this government to take action to protect the people of Canada from criminals. That is why we introduced Bill C-10.

If the opposition parties have amendments to propose that will provide Canadians with stronger protection against criminals, the government will consider them. However, we are asking the NDP why it has voted against every bill designed to protect Canadians from criminals.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier-Sainte-Marie, NDP): Until now, the government's approach has not been very constructive. Yesterday, all of a sudden, they saw the light. It seems that there is now a small opening.

Since statistics show that Canada's crime rate is declining, will the government commit to taking the necessary time to examine the bill? Are the Conservatives prepared to consider amendments in order to help communities invest in front-line police services rather than forcing the provinces to hire prison guards?

• (1120)

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Madam Speaker, we have already added resources to hire more RCMP officers and provincial and municipal police officers. We have already invested more in community crime prevention programs.

In fact, 77% of Quebecers expect Parliament to adopt stricter laws and tougher penalties for criminals, and that is what the government is doing.

[English]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier-Sainte-Marie, NDP): Madam Speaker, we can all agree that the government's heavy-handed approach has not helped to elevate public discourse and certainly has not helped to make Parliament work.

The Conservatives have used closure seven times in 25 sitting days and countless times at committees.

Shutting down debate is no way to operate for a government rejected by 60% of Canadian voters.

Will the Conservatives put an end to the repeated use of closures and let MPs do their work?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Madam Speaker, by the same strange math, over 80% of Canadians voted against the NDP. They voted against the soft-on-crime, high-tax, job-killing agenda of the NDP. They voted for a government that will focus on job creation and safe communities. That is what we are delivering through our platform commitments.

We, of course, are committed to debate. These two bills, the budget implementation act and the crime omnibus bill, have received 48 hours of debate in this place and 152 speeches. Many of these items have been debated repeatedly in different sessions of this Parliament.

We are committed to debate but we are also committed to acting and keeping our platform commitments.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Madam Speaker, yesterday, the government finally agreed to delay ramming Bill C-10 through committee to allow at least some debate, which is a good sign, but now the government must take the next step.

Will the government agree, not only to stop ramming this behemoth of a crime bill through, but to allow a meaningful debate and agree to reasonable amendments, like the ones suggested by groups such as the Canadian Bar Association, legal experts and the provinces?

Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Madam Speaker, Canadians are concerned about crime, which is why they gave our government a strong mandate to keep our streets and communities safe. We need to keep that focus.

The opposition wants to punish law-abiding duck hunters and farmers but oppose tougher sentences for pedophiles and drug dealers.

Oral Questions

The fact is that Parliament has already seen and debated the measures contained in Bill C-10. Over the course of the past four years, the justice committee has had 67 days, which was 139 hours of discussions, 95 hours of debate, 261 speeches and 363 witness appearances.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Madam Speaker, the Conservatives used to complain about Liberal arrogance but the behaviour of the Conservative government makes Liberal arrogance look like humility.

The government can do things differently. New Democrats are reasonable people. We have constructive amendments to bring forward based on what we heard at committee, including those proposed by the province of Quebec.

What was not reasonable was to shut down debate, limit time and refuse to work with others. It is not what Canadians want.

Will the Conservatives agree to listen to Canadians and change their ill-advised, prison-based crime agenda?

Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Madam Speaker, the time for talk is over. The time for action is now. By moving quickly to reintroduce these measures to make our streets and communities safer, we are taking action, as we committed to do. Our focus is to meet the promises we made and to stand up for all law-abiding Canadians.

I was in those same meetings yesterday and the hon. member was the one who moved the amendment to agree to time allocation to get this done by Wednesday at midnight, and we appreciate his co-operation.

* * *

• (1125)

[Translation]

DEMOCRACY

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as we all know, ever since Parliament opened in September, this government has not stopped showing its contempt for parliamentary democracy, either by constantly trying to limit debate on bills or by using secrecy and intimidation tactics in committee. Having a majority does not entitle the government to abuse its power.

When is this government going to change?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Madam Speaker, on the contrary, on two important bills—one on the budget and the other on crime—we had 152 hours of debate and 48 speeches. During previous sessions in the past few Parliaments, there have been many debates on a number of bills. At the end of the day, the government has a mandate from Canadians, who expect the government and Parliament to get moving on implementing our economic action plan and our bills to protect communities from crime. That is what we are going to do.

Oral Questions

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Madam Speaker, being in power also means working with the provinces. Over the past week we have seen this government's attitude toward Quebec. We have seen how the Conservatives are dealing with Bill C-10 and jeopardizing Quebec's approach to rehabilitation. We saw how this government dealt with Minister Dutil, who was told that the firearms registry database will not be available.

Working in our country, within this confederation, also requires working with the provinces. When are they going to do that?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Madam Speaker, this government has an extraordinary record when it comes to federal-provincial relations. That is why we have seen an extraordinary decline in support for separation in Quebec. Quebec has received a 60% increase in its federal transfers. Quebecers expect Parliament to legislate harsher sentences for criminals. In fact, 77% of Quebecers expect that and we are going to deliver. We are going to deliver a fairer justice system for Quebecers and Canadians.

[English]

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the arrogance of the government knows absolutely no bounds. It is limiting debate and pig-headedly refusing to work with the provinces. This week, one minister from Quebec said that this was not a government that was tough on crime, that this was a government that was tough on democracy.

Yesterday, in committee, a Conservative member told people that police representatives were misrepresenting the truth.

When will the Conservatives stop acting like bullies and act in a responsible manner in this democratic country?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): The real question, Madam Speaker, is when will the Liberal Party finally learn the lesson of the last election. Canadians want parliamentarians to stand up for victims of crime rather than criminals. When will the Liberals understand that 77% of Quebecers say that there should be more serious penal sentences for criminals? When will the Liberal Party understand that it is unacceptable to Canadians that too many repeat and even violent criminals end up with house arrest or go through the revolving door of bail?

Canadians believe that serious criminals should do serious time. We agree with Canadians and we will act to ensure that happens.

* * *

[Translation]

PENSION PLANS

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Madam Speaker, more and more Canadians are wondering if they will be able to retire one day. For example, I know of a retired nurse in my riding who has a pension of only \$520 per month. She cannot even afford her diabetes medication or her mortgage and she is racking up debt.

With the Conservatives' new plan, retired Canadians would be risking their savings by putting them in a flawed program, without any guarantee of seeing their money again.

Instead, why not improve government pension plans such as the CPP and QPP, which are affordable and safe?

• (1130)

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Madam Speaker, as we have already said, our government is moving forward with its plans. Do not just take our word for it. I will quote Yves-Thomas Dorval, president of the Conseil du patronat du Québec, whose comments reiterate our commitment to this.

The Quebec government could follow the federal government's lead and put in place the conditions that would allow Quebec businesses to establish similar plans and encourage workers to make voluntary contributions to retirement savings plans.

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Madam Speaker, by relying solely on the performance of the stock markets to provide retirement funds for Canadians, the government is playing a dangerous game. Families' retirement savings are melting away like snow in the sun. What is the government's solution? It will let big banks speculate with families' money. The Conservatives insist on going ahead with a program that just does not work.

Will this government finally listen to Canadians in order to protect their retirement savings?

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Madam Speaker, we have worked very hard to enhance Canadians' retirement security. For example, we reduced taxes for seniors and retirees by more than \$2 billion, mainly by allowing pension income splitting. But the NDP voted against that. We restructured the framework for pensions that are under federal jurisdiction in order to better protect retirees. What did the NDP do? It voted against that. Together with the provinces, because we respect their jurisdictions, we reviewed proposals for making other improvements. That is why we are now introducing our pension plans—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Gatineau.

* * *

[English]

PAY EQUITY

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Madam Speaker, after almost three decades of legal battles the Supreme Court of Canada made a quick ruling in favour of women workers at Canada Post asking for pay equity. Women should not have to wait so long for justice.

The government has turned back the clock even further by introducing regressive legislation that excludes women from even making complaints.

Why does the government not believe in the right of equal pay for work of equal value? Why is the government so tough on women?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Madam Speaker, the government is committed to equal pay for equal work. The decision in this three decades old case actually shows that the previous system was broken. Our government fixed the system, so that unions can no longer negotiate away equal pay only then to force legal, costly and adversarial court battles.

Women should not have to wait decades to get equal pay for equal work.

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Madam Speaker, that is the problem. The Conservatives do not understand the concept of pay equity. We are talking about equal pay for work of equal value.

[Translation]

The Conservatives' pay equity bill is nothing more than a smokescreen. Women and unions are no longer able to make complaints. The result is simple: women must forget about justice. Today, women still earn 70¢ for every dollar a man earns. We need federal pay equity legislation similar to what we have in Quebec. Canadian women deserve equality.

Why does this government refuse to ensure that women earn the wages they deserve?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Madam Speaker, our government believes that women deserve equality. Our Conservative government believes in the principle of equal pay for equal work. The decision made in this nearly 30-year-old case shows that the previous system was broken. Our government fixed the system so that unions can no longer negotiate away equal pay and then provoke long and costly legal battles.

Women should not have to wait decades to obtain equal pay for equal work.

* * *

[English]

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Madam Speaker, at the last G20 meetings the government signed on to the principles of consumer protection for the financial sector. It promised to guarantee access to a fair and independent complaints system for Canadians, and yet the TD bank recently walked away from the banking ombudsman without even a peep of concern from the government.

Why is the government refusing to stand up to banks and protect Canadian consumers from being gouged?

• (1135)

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Madam Speaker, currently, all banks are required to have consumer complaints procedures in place and have a third party dispute handling body.

However, there is variation in procedures used, and this is of concern to us and to consumers. To better protect consumers, we are forcing banks to belong to government approved independent third party bodies. We are establishing uniform regulatory standards for internal complaints procedures. We are giving the Financial

Oral Questions

Consumer Agency of Canada the authority to monitor and enforce compliance. We passed legislation for this and are now finalizing regulations.

Unfortunately, the NDP voted against all of that.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Madam Speaker, we vote against the government's inaction on creating jobs and the economy.

What we need to see from the government is not allowing the big banks to police themselves. The Royal Bank and the TD have dropped out. Others could soon follow. The Ombudsman for Banking Services and Investments has helped protect Canadians for more than 15 years, the best way to keep the banks honest. However, the government cares more about tax breaks for banks than keeping them accountable.

When are the Conservatives going to close the door on allowing banks to leave the OBSI and protect Canadians?

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am going to close the door on that feigned concern for Canadians and the economy.

When we look at the real facts here, NDP members really do not care about jobs and the economy. Why are they pushing a \$10 billion tax hike on employers that would kill Canadian jobs? Why are they subscribing to a massive CPP payroll tax hike that would kill jobs?

The NDP has an anti-trade agenda. It is anti-Canada by going to the United States and asking that Canadian jobs be eliminated. I would ask that the NDP members explain why they are so against our country and our people?

* * *

[Translation]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Madam Speaker, the United States is moving towards a green economy, and that is what Canadians want to do as well. We went to Washington to tell them what Canadians think about the Keystone project and to do this government's job.

But this government is still failing to take action on the environment. Canadians do not want a dangerous pipeline. When will the government stop listening to the oil lobby and start listening to Canadians?

[English]

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Madam Speaker, Canadians are extremely fortunate to have the third largest proven oil reserves in the world, including the oil sands. We intend to develop those. We believe we can do that with the environmental protection that is necessary.

Oral Questions

It is unfortunate the NDP opposes all of those things. I do not know why it continues to denigrate our economy, and goes down to Washington trying to damage job creation in this country. We are going to continue to work for Canadians.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Madam Speaker, the government can shut down debate in the House, but it cannot shut up the opposition.

Rather than continuing its lobbying efforts on behalf of big oil companies, the government should do what it promised and actually regulate oil sands emissions. The government's PR campaign is not fooling the Europeans or the Americans.

When will the government stop listening only to the oil lobby and do the right thing by introducing emission regulations for oil and gas?

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Madam Speaker, the more I hear from the NDP about the economy, the more I understand why my province fell behind with NDP governments. They are disconnected from the real concerns and needs of Canadians.

We continue to work to build an economy. Why is the NDP working so hard to destroy Canadian opportunities?

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Madam Speaker, it falls to MPs on this side of the House to speak up for Canadians who care about the environment because that side is too busy meeting with oil lobbyists.

While we are working toward a green economy for the future, it has its own meetings. We found out today that TransCanada lobbyists met with government officials a whopping 56 times since May. It is such a cozy relationship that it is not hard to believe that the government is big oil's number one cheerleader.

Why is the government so willing to listen to big oil but not Canadians? Just who does it work for?

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Madam Speaker, why do the NDP members not support this country in the development of the economy across the country? Them talking about jobs and about pipelines, and oil sands is ridiculous.

Their former critic calls for a moratorium and actually some of their leadership candidates want to shut down development of the oil sands as well. Why do they not be honest? They are standing up and talking about destroying hundreds of thousands of jobs for Canadians.

We believe we can move ahead with the proper environmental protections and the proper economic development. We are going to continue to do that for Canadians. We are going to continue to provide them with jobs and more opportunities.

* * *

● (1140)

GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURES

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Madam Speaker, under the government's watch federal spending has shot up 37%.

That is 60 billion more dollars a year spent. The Conservatives go around preaching small government, but meanwhile they have squandered the surplus and wasted so much money on gazebos, jails, and pet projects that they are now slashing departmental funding just to make ends meet. They spent Canada into a deficit even before the recession.

I am from a small business background where every penny counts, so I would like to ask, does the government need our help understanding the real priorities of Canadians?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is true that we did increase transfers to the provinces for health care by some 33% after they had been slashed by the opposition when they had their hand at the helm.

We did restore funding for the military, this is true, and we did take action during the economic downturn with stimulus funding. As a result, we have been able to create over 600,000 net new jobs since that downturn. We have been delivering for Canadians.

It is also time now to ensure that we move toward that fiscal balance that is necessary. We are doing that by winding down stimulus spending and by implementing our deficit reduction action plan.

From the opposition, we only hear calls for higher taxes that will kill jobs and opposition to projects that will create jobs. We are delivering for Canadians with more jobs.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Madam Speaker, lots of smug talk about fiscal balance, but we have just learned that the Prime Minister has overruled his own Minister of National Defence and is forcing National Defence to repaint a VIP government aircraft because he does not like its colour.

The current fleet of aircraft are painted military grey because they are used in critical military operations. The Prime Minister's vanity paint job will make the plane unsafe for those very military operations. Why is the Prime Minister putting his own vanity above the needs of the military?

Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Madam Speaker, apart from being a complete non sequitur with the member's first question, the accusation made is completely unfounded. These changes would only happen in accordance with the regular maintenance cycle of National Defence and if they are cost neutral. These aircraft are repainted every six years and there is no current plan to change the paint scheme for any airbus aircraft.

CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we have known for some time that Canada would win the WTO challenge against the United States protectionist country of origin labelling. We know that this action has cost Canadian livestock producers in excess of \$5 billion and has forced some Canadian farmers out of business. Yet, with that leverage in hand, where are the ministers? Doing a photo op. Ministers should be in the United States capital demanding compensation for Canadian losses and Canadian producers.

I ask the minister, has the government even entered negotiations with the United States to secure this victory for farmers?

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Madam Speaker, the hon. member is absolutely right, today the WTO panel released its final report which determined the country of origin labelling measures discriminated against foreign livestock and was inconsistent with U.S. WTO trade rules.

I can also tell the hon. member that we will continue to work on behalf of Canadian producers to supply more Canadian jobs and more opportunity, whether that means going to the WTO or going directly to our trading partners.

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[Translation]

BORDER CROSSINGS

Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP): Madam Speaker, since April 1, three border crossings in my riding—Morses Line, East Pinnacle and Glen Sutton—have had their hours of operation reduced, while other crossings have been completely shut down. In addition to restricting the flow of goods and services as well as people, this also puts jobs at risk.

Does the government realize that it is seriously jeopardizing the socio-economic balance of that border region? Will it reverse its decision?

• (1145)

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Madam Speaker, the government always carefully considers any decision it makes that may have an impact on the livelihood and trade that our nation engages in. What I am very concerned about is not only the jobs at our border but the hundreds of thousands of jobs that member's party is destroying by the destructive lobbying in the United States against Canadian interests.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP): Madam Speaker, under the pretext of cutting costs, the government is penalizing our region. While the economy remains fragile, the government's measures are harmful to farmers, tourists, emergency services that have cross-border reciprocal agreements, and all of the families that feel torn apart by these service reductions.

Oral Questions

Will the government commit to reopening the border crossings that have been closed and returning the others to their former hours of operation?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Madam Speaker, let us talk about the hundreds of thousands of jobs that member's party, the NDP, wants to shut down. It wants to shut down the seal industry, a vital and important economic activity in many communities. It wants to shut down the forestry sector in B.C. and the aerospace sector in Quebec. It wants to shut down automobile manufacturing in central Canada. It wants to shut down the truck drivers who cross the border every day. It wants to shut down the GM food sector on farms across the country. Why will the member not work with us to create jobs, rather than shutting down our economy?

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Madam Speaker, once again, they are avoiding the question without answering it.

According to Canada Border Services Agency, "As part of its strategic review, the CBSA will be making some changes to its border operations...to ensure maximum efficiency and cost effectiveness." Meanwhile, the Americans are investing in their border infrastructure. Closing these border crossings makes no sense in terms of economic development and tourism in Canada.

Do the Conservatives realize that they are not walking the talk when it comes to public safety and the economy?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Madam Speaker, what we know is that the New Democrats are focused on shutting down the Canadian economy. They will not have to worry about border crossings; there will be no jobs here. People will not come here for tourism or for economic reasons. The New Democrats want to shut down not only the province of Quebec, they want to shut down industry right across Canada. We will continue in our efforts to maintain our trade relationship with the Americans and the border crossings that are appropriate, to keep that border open.

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will continue asking the same questions.

The Conservatives have let the Americans impose a \$5.50 entry fee on Canadians; the Conservatives are going to be losers in the secret agreement on border security; and they are closing border crossings. What is wrong with this picture?

With the reductions in border services and staff, there has been an increase in criminal activities along the border between Dundee and Franklin. Even RCMP officers have said that closing the Franklin border crossing puts public safety at risk.

Why are the Conservatives suddenly being soft on crime?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Madam Speaker, we have hired hundreds of new CBSA officers. We have increased the number of RCMP officers. I know that when we came into office the Liberals had slashed the training of officers to 300 a year. In 2006, we trained 1,800 RCMP officers. We are concerned about security. We are also concerned about trade. I would ask that member to work with me to ensure that her party, the NDP, works to create jobs and opportunity and works for a safe country.

* * *

CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Madam Speaker, Canada's agricultural products and agri-food industry are in high demand. However, the U.S. country of origin labelling process created uncertainty for livestock producers who depend on the smooth flow of livestock across our shared border. COOL was a step in the wrong direction and that is why we took action. The WTO COOL report was released today.

Could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade explain why this is good news for Canada's livestock producers and workers?

● (1150)

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Mississauga—Streetsville for his hard work on this file and for his dedication in standing up for Canadian farmers and livestock producers.

In 2008, our government took action to defend Canada's high-quality livestock industry against the COOL measure. Today, the WTO panel released its final report, which determined that the country of origin labelling measure discriminates against foreign livestock and is inconsistent with the U.S.-WTO trade obligations.

Thanks to our government's action, our livestock industry can get back on track, creating more jobs and more prosperity.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I would like a bit of order please.

The hon. member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl.

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SERVICE CANADA

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Madam Speaker, Service Canada budget cuts mean fewer people are processing employment insurance claims and handling calls. Claimants are often forced to wait well beyond the normal processing time of about 28 days. With no income for six weeks to two months, workers and families are having a hard time putting food on the table and paying bills.

My question comes directly from a Service Canada employee in St. John's, Newfoundland. When is the government going to stop talking about automation and actually fix the problems at Service Canada?

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is really unfortunate that union leaders, who have clearly convinced the opposition party, are selfishly attempting to ensure that the old, ineffective, labour-intensive method of processing EI claims is what we should be focused on.

Our government's top priority is getting Canadians back to work and promoting economic growth. We are committed to providing timely service. As we have said before, no Service Canada offices will be closing nor will there be any cuts to front-line services offered by Service Canada.

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Madam Speaker, those guys just do not get the desperation of the situation.

I wonder if the Prime Minister or the Minister of Finance would be prepared to visit an EI call centre to take a few telephone calls themselves. They could hear first-hand the damage their government is doing.

Across the country, fewer and fewer Canadians are eligible for EI. Almost 60% of unemployed workers in Canada do not qualify. Delays are way beyond anything acceptable.

When will the government stop steamrolling ahead with more cuts to Service Canada?

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Madam Speaker, as I mentioned before, no Service Canada offices will be closing. As a result of this initiative, there will be no impact on in-person services offered by Service Canada.

Automation is important. Making sure we move forward to make sure more Canadians are served in a timely manner is important. We are going to move forward with this process.

* * *

POVERTY

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Madam Speaker, Sunday is Universal Children's Day and the government is celebrating with a dismal record on children and families.

One in ten children live in poverty while the government offers boutique tax credits to wealthy Canadians. Two out of every five food bank users are children. Food inflation continues to rise and the government offers big tax breaks to corporations.

Why does the government refuse to adopt a long-term, comprehensive strategy to eliminate poverty that would actually make it better for children and their families?

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Madam Speaker, every action this government takes is to help Canadians and their families become independent and able to contribute to the economy and to their communities.

We have had a decline since the peak under the Liberals of 18.4% to 9.5% under this government for children living in low-income families. The poverty rate for children living with single mothers has fallen to an all-time low of 21.5% from the peak of 56% under the Liberals. This government is moving forward on reducing poverty for children.

Why does the NDP not support our initiatives that are working?

• (1155)

[Translation]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Madam Speaker, these same old lines the government keeps using will not help children. The Conservatives can pat themselves on the back, but the reality is that the number of children living in poverty has not changed.

Twenty years ago, the House unanimously passed a motion presented by then-NDP leader, Ed Broadbent, to put an end to child poverty in Canada. At least the government at that time was concerned about children.

Why is the current government indifferent towards children, especially children living in poverty?

[English]

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Madam Speaker, the average Canadian family now spends \$3,000 less per year in taxes. Those are funds that Canadians can use to invest in their family and their own children, thanks to this Conservative government.

Whether it is enhancing the national child benefit, or enhancing the child tax benefit, this government is working for Canadian families and their children. Why does the NDP not support these initiatives?

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the story of first nations education in Canada is a tragedy of lost generations. Still only 35% of first nations children are graduating from high schools. Preliminary reports from the national panel on first nations education made clear the shameful reality that often first nations students do not go to school because there is no running water in the school and the building itself is unsafe.

Will the government confirm today that yesterday's commitment to safe drinking water in first nations homes will also address the urgent priority of first nations schools?

Oral Questions

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Madam Speaker, we are finding innovative solutions to improve the quality of education for first nations. We have a joint action plan with the national chief. The K to 12 panel is doing some very good work. We have also invested in a major way in school renovation and school construction across the country. We built or repaired 100 schools and work is under way on over 100 more. The economic action plan was a big part of this.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the Conservatives are crossing flight paths in the confusion to defend their reckless procurement of the F-35s. The Associate Minister of National Defence contradicted himself when he said the Conservatives are not looking at other options, but there is a plan B. The Minister of National Defence finally saw the light and began to share the concern we have that the F-35 project will be in big trouble when the Americans pull out.

Who is running the show? Is it the Minister of National Defence, the junior minister of defence, the Prime Minister? Maybe it is the parliamentary secretary. Who is going to take the blame?

Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Madam Speaker, as we have said many times in the House, our plan to equip Canada's men and women, to protect Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic and elsewhere remains absolutely on track. The F-35 is the right aircraft for that mission in coming decades and we are glad that our allies are reminding their parliaments of the importance of this important technology that is creating jobs for Canadian companies across this country.

As the Defense Secretary of the United States said today in Halifax:

The F-35 is going to be an essential fighter that will help NORAD and will be the future in helping us with the security challenges that we face.

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CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, when will the government finally follow the advice of the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel and stop playing judge and jury for the Federal Court of Appeal? Will the government finally listen to the Canadian Bar Association, Parliament's lawyer, and the opposition and wait for the courts to do their work?

When will Conservatives allow the courts to function independently and recognize that their political agenda comes second to their constitutional duties?

Oral Questions

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would respond to the question with a question. When will the NDP understand that this is about fundamental accountability and transparency for each and every Canadian? Hard-working Canadians contribute their tax dollars to this government. Many of those dollars go toward the support of the public broadcaster. All we are seeking from the public broadcaster is transparency and accountability because families in my riding and the member's riding deserve nothing less than transparency from the public broadcaster.

• (1200)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, we, too, are in favour of as much transparency as possible at the CBC, but being accountable does not mean ignoring political and legal processes. The actions of the member for Peterborough were illegitimate and illegal.

This precedent is contrary to our institutions and to the separation of powers. The government is setting itself above the constitutional role of the House. The Canadian Constitution also applies to the Conservative caucus. Will it respect the separation of legislative and judicial powers?

[*English*]

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Madam Speaker, I was here in the previous parliament when the previous Speaker ruled that Parliament was indeed supreme. It is a ruling that has in fact been reviewed in parliaments around the world that have similar systems to us.

I would simply say for the member that the average family of four in my riding and in his riding contributes the equivalent of a week's worth of groceries to the CBC. Do those members not believe that those hard-working families deserve transparency and accountability from the CBC? They deserve to see how their money is being spent. They deserve nothing less from their public broadcaster.

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DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Liberals said only a few weeks ago that our government's fair representation act seemed like a fair bill. The bill moves every province closer to representation by population. It provides fair representation for faster-growing provinces, while at the same time protecting the representation of smaller provinces like mine.

As a member from a smaller province in our federation, I have serious concerns with the Liberal scheme to designate my province a loser of House of Commons representation.

Could the government House leader update this place on the government's fair—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hon. government House leader.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Madam Speaker, when we introduced our fair representation bill, the Liberals actually said that it was fair, but that did not stop them from coming up with the worse idea, and they announced that today. Their worse idea would actually leave Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia severely under-represented, yet at the same time it would take away seats from Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Quebec, Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

Under our bill, every province would move closer to fair representation, to representation by population. Under the Liberal plan, almost every province comes out a loser.

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INFRASTRUCTURE

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Madam Speaker, recently I visited a grade 9 class of Cabot High in northern Cape Breton. Its number one ask of the federal government is to pay its share to finish its rink. Members of the community have put up mortgages, the junior hockey league has held a fundraiser and a community over 500 kilometres away has donated equipment. Two other levels of government have stepped up to the plate.

Muskoka got its rink. Does northern Cape Breton have to host a G8 summit to get the rink finished?

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Madam Speaker, a few things need to be corrected. Since 2006, over \$160 million in funding has been dedicated toward 1,350 projects within Cape Breton and the Mulgrave area of Nova Scotia. This is the first thing that needs to go on the record.

Our economic action plan alone has represented \$9.6 million invested in 54 projects throughout Cape Breton. The federal government has been standing up for Cape Breton.

* * *

[*Translation*]

VETERANS

Mr. Réjean Genest (Shefford, NDP): Madam Speaker, the government is abandoning the veterans who have served Canada. By negotiating to transfer to the Quebec government the last federal hospital that treats veterans exclusively, Veterans Affairs will lose 1,300 jobs.

How will veterans receive the services they are entitled to? How can the minister tell our veterans, who so proudly wore the uniform, that their government is abandoning them?

• (1205)

[*English*]

Ms. Eve Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Madam Speaker, our government is taking action for veterans and our men and women in uniform. Our government has increased benefits to veterans.

The Government of Canada and the Government of Quebec have entered into preliminary discussions for the possible transfer of Ste. Anne's Hospital. Under no circumstances will the level of care that we provide to our veterans ever be compromised. We believe, unlike the NDP, that the province of Quebec can run a hospital.

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ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Madam Speaker, we know that when first nations communities take control of their own future it benefits not only those communities but all of Canada.

Could the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development please explain to the House how we are working with willing partners to support the Labrador Innu and building Atlantic Canada and also the broader Canadian economy?

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Madam Speaker, today Canada, Newfoundland and Labrador and the Innu of Labrador are signing historic agreements to positively impact the future of the Innu nation and the Lower Churchill hydro development project. The new dawn agreements include the Innu land claim and self-government agreement in principle and the Lower Churchill Innu impact and benefits agreement.

I congratulate all of the leaders who have made this happen, including the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, and the former Labrador Innu leader who represents Canada today.

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RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Madam Speaker, let us talk about who is actually shutting down economic activity in my riding.

Let us talk about the rail service on Vancouver Island, which was guaranteed to British Columbia as part of Confederation. That rail service was shut down in April due to a lack of funding to repair the railbed. Now the bud cars that provided that service have actually been removed from Vancouver Island. That is not a good sign.

The owner of the track, the Island Corridor Foundation, is ready to go. The province, on June 28, provided a commitment to its share of the funding and is ready to go. All we are missing is action by the Conservative government.

Will the Conservative government now commit to providing its share, the \$7.5 million that is needed to get this line running again or—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hon. Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Madam Speaker, as with all other important files, the owners of these businesses and organizations have a responsibility. And the owners

Points of Order

usually assume that responsibility. Of course, we are aware of this file and we will continue to undertake the necessary analyses.

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JUSTICE

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Madam Speaker, in his response to the Quebec justice minister on Bill C-10, the Minister of Justice expressed all his contempt for Quebec's 40 years of rehabilitation expertise, particularly its expertise in the rehabilitation of young offenders. The minister wrote that it is important to work with its provincial partners but this appears to be a one-way partnership—my way or no way.

Will the Minister of Justice put aside his ideological obsession and respect the will of Quebec by incorporating Quebec's required amendments into the bill, namely those pertaining to the long-term protection of the public and the rehabilitation and social reintegration of young offenders?

[*English*]

Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Madam Speaker, we are always happy to work with our provincial counterparts. The principles of rehabilitation and reintegration, which have been so successful in Quebec, will continue to serve as the basis for Canada's youth justice system.

We have responded to Quebec's concerns with a series of past amendments, as well as a new amendment that is tabled at the justice committee now.

We are taking a balanced approach. We are listening. It is time for the opposition to end its grandstanding, support victims and support our measures on Bill C-10.

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POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this might be an interesting one. Ministers or parliamentary secretaries who quote from a text have to table the text in the House. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade was quoting the text from his iPad.

Would he table the iPad in the House so we can get a look at it.

● (1210)

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Madam Speaker, it would be a bit incongruous to table the iPad, but I would certainly be happy to supply the page of text from which I was reading.

The Deputy Speaker: Before we begin routine proceedings, there was a point of order raised earlier this morning, and I would like to correct a statement I made about members in the House referring to the presence or absence of members at committee.

Routine Proceedings

Having verified this practice, there is indeed a different standard used when referring to members attendance in committee, since in committee, as we know, attendance is recorded. There is a public record for those proceedings, whereas in the House there is not.

I apologize for any inconvenience or confusion that my comments may have caused.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8)(b) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to six petitions.

* * *

PETITIONS

REPUBLIC OF THE FIJI ISLANDS

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to rise to present a petition signed by hundreds of people all across British Columbia, calling for the establishment of a high commission in the Republic of the Fiji Islands.

Many people from the Fijian community in Canada, which I would point out number over 100,000 strong, have pointed out that the lack of consular services in Fiji presents a lot of difficulties for them.

The petitioners note that Fiji is a member of the Commonwealth of Nations. They state that the lack of consular services in that country means the situation causes inordinate delay and efficient service for tourist, visa, business and immigration issues, both for Canadian and Fijian citizens. They also note that the United States, Australia, New Zealand, China and India all have embassies or high commissions in Fiji.

I want to point out the hard work of one of my constituents, Mr. Vince Sharma, who has collected thousands and thousands of signatures, calling on the government to establish this very important services for Fijians and for Canadians of Fijian descent who travel to Fiji on business and personal business very frequently. This would be of great assistance to them.

ASSISTED SUICIDE

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Madam Speaker, my constituents, primarily in the Quinte West area, make note that the Canadian Medical Association opposes assisted suicide and euthanasia and calls for suicide provincial programs to strengthen where necessary and urges its members to educate themselves and uphold the principles of palliative care.

The petitioners also wish that Parliament would retain section 241 of the Criminal Code, without changes, in order that Parliament not sanction or allow the counselling, aiding or abetting of suicide, whether by personal action or the Internet.

SERVICE CANADA

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Madam Speaker, once again, this is on behalf of many residents in the area of my riding known as Bonavista North, who had a unique relationship with Service Canada over the past five years at least.

The relationship was such that a community partnership developed between the Service Canada office in Gander. If one travelled about two hours away to Bonavista North, the local community had an office set up for people who wanted to get help with their Canada pension plan, their employment insurance and any other government service.

The problem is the government has now ended that partnership. Twice per month someone from Service Canada goes to that area. If people do not have computers or they are seniors who are not phone savvy, this becomes very problematic because many individuals appreciate the face-to-face contact they had at that office.

This petition is from many people in the Bonavista North area who want to restore that partnership.

* * *

• (1215)

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Madam Speaker, Question No. 173 will be answered today.

[Text]

Question No. 173—**Mr. Jean-François Fortin:**

With regard to the mitigation measures announced by the Prime Minister on June 6 for disaster victims in riparian areas in the Gaspé and Montérégie: (a) what is the exact description of these measures; (b) which government department or agency will be responsible for these measures; (c) who will these measures be directed at; (d) what criteria will be used in implementing these measures; (e) what amount does the government expect to spend on these measures; (f) on what date will these measures be accessible; (g) has the government discussed these measures with the Government of Quebec; and (h) how does the government intend to coordinate its efforts with those of the Government of Quebec?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada recognizes the value and contribution of proactive mitigation measures taken before an emergency or disaster occurs to eliminate or reduce the impacts and risks of hazards in order to protect lives, property, the environment, and reduce economic disruption. Not only does mitigation serve to reduce the impact of disasters on the lives of Canadians, but it is also a cost-effective approach for reducing the economic burden of disaster response and recovery costs on all levels of government, businesses, communities, families and individuals.

On June 6, 2011, while visiting the Quebec region of Montérégie to see first-hand the impact of the 2011 spring floods, the Prime Minister announced that the Government of Canada will share on a 50-50 basis the costs of any permanent flood mitigation measures taken specifically for this year's flooding that are not otherwise eligible under the federal disaster financial assistance arrangements.

Public Safety, the lead federal department for meeting this commitment, has been working with other government departments and the Province of Quebec to establish a one-time mitigation contribution program to cost share eligible permanent flood mitigation measures. Input is being sought from the Province of Quebec on the types of measures put in place and their costs to inform the development of the program terms and conditions, including the specific eligibility criteria for cost sharing.

The principles enshrined in “An Emergency Management Framework for Canada”, the national framework, second edition, approved by federal-provincial-territorial, FPT, ministers responsible for emergency management in January 2011, and in the national disaster mitigation strategy, endorsed by FPT ministers in January 2008, are being used to inform the development of this one-time mitigation contribution program.

As outlined in these key FPT documents, mitigation is an important part of a robust emergency management framework. Disaster prevention and mitigation measures are those that eliminate or reduce the impacts and risks of hazards through proactive measures taken before an emergency or disaster occurs. Measures may be structural, for example, flood dikes, or non-structural, for example, land use zoning and building codes.

Public Safety is seeking detailed estimates from the Province of Quebec on the costs of the permanent mitigation measures put in place for this year's flooding in order to recommend a funding amount to establish a one-time mitigation contribution program, which would allow reimbursement of eligible incurred costs.

Once the program is established, the Government of Canada will share on a 50-50 basis the costs of eligible permanent flood mitigation measures put in place by the Province of Quebec. The exact amount that the Government of Canada will reimburse will depend on the costs of the eligible provincial measures put in place. Until a formal claim has been submitted by the Province under the program, it is not possible to estimate how much the Government of Canada will spend.

Public Safety is working closely with the Ministère de la Sécurité publique of Quebec as the program is being developed and will continue to do so as we move forward. The goal is to have the program established in early 2012. Once in place, Public Safety will share the detailed eligibility criteria with the province and work with it to facilitate the processing of its cost-sharing claim so that funds can flow in as timely a manner as possible.

* * *

[English]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Madam Speaker, if Question No. 165 could be made an order for return, this return would be tabled immediately.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Government Orders

[Text]

Question No. 165—**Hon. John McKay:**

With respect to the opening of the Department of National Defence (DND) offices at 3500 Carling Avenue, Ottawa, Ontario, also known as the Nortel Campus: (a) what was the total cost to open the facility for use by DND, broken down by (i) the initial cost to purchase the land and facilities, (ii) the cost to renovate the facilities to make it operational for DND purposes; (b) how many staff are currently operating from the Nortel Campus and is this the full complement that the facility will accommodate, or, if not, how many more is it expected to accommodate; (c) what are the functions that these personnel are engaged in, i.e. human resources, accounting, military command, etc.; (d) what is the time frame to transfer all of the services from the National Defence Headquarters (NDHQ) to the new location; (e) what, if any, services or functions will remain at the current NDHQ location; (f) will DND services at facilities other than NDHQ be moved to the Nortel Campus, and, if so, what services and from which locations, specifying the complete addresses of the buildings and the services, will be moved; and (g) what will be the total annual operational cost to operate the Nortel facility?

(Return tabled)

[English]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Madam Speaker, I ask that the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

MARKETING FREEDOM FOR GRAIN FARMERS ACT

The House resumed consideration of Bill C-18, An Act to reorganize the Canadian Wheat Board and to make consequential and related amendments to certain Acts, as reported (with amendment) from the committee, and of the motions in Group No. 1.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak to these amendments.

Thus far, in this discussion at report stage, the government has, in its way, tried to smear the board in the eyes of the public. I would think Canadians would expect that the minister and his parliamentary secretary, who both took an oath of office to uphold their responsibilities, would think ill of that.

One could imagine what would happen if we had the Minister of Health trying to destroy the health system in this country, or if we had the Minister of State for Science and Technology trying to do away with science and technology.

What we have, in this case, are two ministers who are doing the direct opposite and doing everything within their power to smear the Canadian Wheat Board. It is for that reason that I want to put a couple of things on the record so that the public understands just what we are talking about here.

Government Orders

What is the Canadian Wheat Board? The Canadian Wheat Board has been working for wheat and barley farmers for over 75 years. It ensures that all wheat and barley farmers get the best possible price for their crops. The Canadian Wheat Board is paid for and run by the farmers it benefits. The Canadian Wheat Board sells grain all around the world. It arranges for its transportation from thousands of farms to customers in some 70 countries. The critical component for the Canadian Wheat Board to be able to do its job is single desk selling. That is the essence of the board.

How does the Board help farmers? The Canadian Wheat Board's annual revenues are \$5 billion to \$8 billion, all of which are returned to farmers, less operating costs, as profit. The cost of that operation is 7¢ per bushel. It is unbelievably efficient. Those returns going back to farmers are not taken off as shares for some private grain company. The benefits actually go back to the primary producers.

Studies by leading agriculture economists, using the Canadian Wheat Board data, concluded that the Wheat Board earned prairie farmers hundreds of millions of dollars a year more than they would have achieved on the open market. In fact, it was around \$500 million.

The Canadian Wheat Board manages a supply chain that extends from the farm gate to the end-use customer. It has an envied international reputation for consistent quality and supply, superior service and technical support. However, without the authority of single desk, it will be almost impossible for the Wheat Board to do its job.

The parliamentary secretary went on at length talking about the fact that farmers would still have a board. However, they would have a board without teeth and without the authority to do its job. He said that the farmers would have a choice, that they could go to the board or to the open market. However, when I asked him about whether the farmers would have the choice between single desk and the open market, the parliamentary secretary failed to answer. He claimed that they would have their board. However, this new board would not be like the old board. It would be a board in name only. It would not have single desk selling.

In fact, this would be a government takeover with, as somebody said earlier, five stooges appointed by the minister. It would really be the minister's wheat board. The government is expropriating the Wheat Board, which is run, controlled and was built by farmers in Canada, taking it over and running it as its own agency. I will go through a little bit of that because that becomes clear with Bill C-18.

Bill C-18 begins by eliminating the 10 elected board members and replacing them with 5 ministerial appointed directors. Just who will those hand-picked directors be? According to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food's own officials, they will answer to the minister, not to the farmers.

• (1220)

I will quote what the assistant deputy minister said to the committee. He said, "It", meaning the legislation, "enables the minister to provide direction to the board in the manner in which it operates". It could not be more clear. There is nothing vague there. The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, sitting in Ottawa, will now tell the board of directors what to do, how to do it and when.

We need to keep in mind that that is the minister who has never visited the Wheat Board, other than for 15 minutes, and has never walked into its war room to see how it operates. He has never walked into its transportation room to see how it collects all that grain, 900 miles from tidewater position, thousands of farmers spread over the Prairies, all different types and qualities of wheat and barley, and get that into a transportation system, delivered to a country elevator on a shortline maybe, down the main line and unloaded into the hole of a ship on time so there is no demurrage paid.

The minister has never visited the Wheat Board to understand that. All he is going on is an ideology. He has attacked the board. He has not allowed farmers, under this legislation, to even have a voice at hearings where they could have say.

There is not a single word in this legislation about farmer direction, farmer control or farmers having the right to choose the board of directors they want to run and manage this so-called voluntary Canadian wheat board. In fact, as I said, it is the minister's board.

What is interesting, as well, is that, while the minister picks his own directors, the minister has made sure there is nothing in the legislation concerning conflict of interest. What is to prevent those Conservative appointees from using their time as the minister's hand-picked directors to feather their own nests? Absolutely nothing. That comes from the legal counsel to the agriculture committee when he testified at the committee.

The elimination of an elected board of directors and replacing it with hand-picked appointees is based on what kind of model? I asked that question to Agriculture Canada officials. I asked, "Is there any marketing institution or marketing agency in this country based on this model?". The answer from officials was, "We will get back to you." The answer, quite simply, is that there is not a model like this.

Given that the effect of the government's illegitimate action to destroy a \$5.8 billion institution, one would assume that there is evidence the government can produce to justify itself. The government has stated that the destruction of the Wheat Board will ensure predictability for western grain farmers. Really? What a fallacy.

I will look at just one issue, access for farmers in moving their grain. On page 6 of the working group report, it states:

...there are questions about whether all of the current market participants, particularly the smaller players...will have effective, competitive access to the entire grain logistics chain from farm to vessel. Similar issues were raised with... respect to short lines and access to producer cars....

Given that fact, the minister announced on November 8 that he would be setting up a logistics working group to examine these issues. Just where is the predictability? Clearly, right now there is not any.

The Government of Canada is putting at risk the farmers who deliver that grain to the tune of \$5 billion to \$8 billion a year. I can tell members who gains. Who is the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food working for? I think he is working for U.S. farmers. The U.S. has challenged the system 14 times stating that it was an unfair trader and we won every time. In fact, Senator Kent Conrad had a report prepared for him that stated that if the Canadian Wheat Board single desk authority were eliminated, the United States may become more competitive in offshore markets as the advantages enjoyed by the Wheat Board disappear.

So, who is the minister working for? However, the worst is that now the minister has, by executive order, put his hands in farmers' pockets to pickpocket them. He is taking the contingency fund of up to \$200 million, which is farmers' money, the money they earned from the sale of their grain, to provide a cushion for this proposed new board of his hand-picked directors.

• (1225)

It is unbelievable that this could happen without farmers even having a vote or a say through hearings on how this could or should not be done.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one of the things I have always found rather peculiar about the position of our friends in the Liberal Party on the question of the Canadian Wheat Board is that they believe that only western Canadian farmers should be compelled to sell their property to the government but not Ontario farmers, not Quebec grain farmers, and not Atlantic Canadian grain farmers.

I wonder if the member really believes in compelling farmers to sell their property to the government on pain of imprisonment because farmers have been put in prison. The Liberals are against increased prison sentences for violent criminals, but apparently they are for a system that imprisons grain farmers for selling their own property.

If they think it is so great, why do they not propose an amendment to make it a national wheat board and compel Atlantic, Quebec and Ontario farmers to sell their wheat to the government?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, there is one thing about Liberals. We believe laws should be abided by and we do not pick and choose which laws should be abided by. If a law was broken, it was broken. The Conservatives claim to support supply management, but if five or ten producers decide to ship milk outside of the supply management system, are they going to allow that to happen? A system has to work with rules and regulations.

I will say this to the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism. I will stack up my time on western farmers against

Government Orders

him on farms any day of the week because I have been on farm after farm in western Canada, so allow farmers a vote, for Pete's sake.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to quote here from an email I received. It quotes the minister who said:

There wouldn't be any attempt to impose dual marketing on the CWB unless a majority of producers voted for it.

The minister went on to say:

Until farmers make that change, I'm not prepared to work arbitrarily. They [farmers] are absolutely right to believe in democracy. I do, too.

Could the member comment on that, please?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, we had quite a little discussion on that same quote earlier this morning where strong language was used in this House. In fact, I had to apologize to the Speaker.

However, these are the facts. If the minister made the statement in Minnedosa on March 27, as the member just quoted, and he did not hold a vote, it is up to Canadians to judge. It is on the record what I said earlier.

The minister obviously was not being truthful. He said he would provide farmers a vote. He said he believed in democracy, but he did not provide a vote. In fact, as the Wheat Board itself said, the Conservatives steamrolled over section 47.1 of the act.

However, the parliamentary secretary went on at great length to talk about what the Wheat Board is doing in terms of its advertising. It is living by its oath of office, but I have here a document which is paid for by the taxpayers of Canada, which is clear misinformation and a smear campaign by the Minister of Agriculture against the Wheat Board. That is wrong.

• (1230)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I believe it is important to get on the record at this time that, in fact, there was a plebiscite conducted by the Canadian Wheat Board because the Minister of Agriculture was negligent in not meeting what many would argue was a legal, definitely a moral, obligation to conduct a plebiscite to see what the farmers really wanted. The plebiscite that was conducted clearly indicated that a vast majority of the prairie grain farmers wanted to retain the Canadian Wheat Board.

Could the member provide further comment on that issue?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, the plebiscite that was conducted by an independent agency by the Wheat Board, because the government would not do it, indicated that 62% of farmers believed in single desk selling of wheat, 51% in terms of barley. Single desk is what makes the system operate. That is what farmers want. There were young farmers in Ottawa this week demanding that this happen.

Government Orders

Earlier the parliamentary secretary mentioned that the Wheat Board had been around a long time, and that technology had changed, and yes it has. However, the Wheat Board is needed more than it ever was in the past. The prairie wheat pools are gone. Many short lines have been abandoned. The Wheat Board is there to protect producer cars and short line railways, and the consolidation in the grain industry is just about unbelievable. The Wheat Board is the only power—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, the time has expired for this particular round.

Resuming debate.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Chris Alexander: Mr. Speaker, a few minutes ago in question period I said in this House, in reply to a member's question, that there was no plan to change the colour scheme on any of the Airbus aircraft that the government possesses. I would like to be perfectly clear that there has been no decision in that regard and to ensure that the record reflects that additional clarification.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I thank the hon. parliamentary secretary for his intervention. I am sure that the House appreciates the clarification.

The member for Malpeque is rising on the same point?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, I am trying to figure out what the parliamentary secretary is saying. Is there a plan or is there not a plan to paint the Prime Minister's aircraft in the colours that the Prime Minister wants, at great cost? Is there or is there not?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): We have heard the parliamentary secretary's clarification to an earlier part of debate today. Other points on this I am sure are really just a matter of debate. We are not going to redo question period.

Resuming debate, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to speak in the House today as part of a debate that, in my opinion, is critical to the future of western Canadian farmers.

The legislation that we are discussing today has been a long time coming. It gives western Canadian durum and barley farmers a right they have called for and richly deserve, and that is the right to choose how best to market the grain they grow.

[*English*]

As the House reviews this legislation, it is important to keep in mind why Canada has a reputation for the quality of our wheat, durum and barley. The answer is quite straightforward and it has nothing to do with the Canadian Wheat Board. Our grains are second to none because the farmers who produce them are committed to quality.

Organizations like the Canadian International Grains Institute and the Canadian Grain Commission play a big role in ensuring the quality of our world class grain handling system. CIGI and the CGC

have always operated independently from the CWB and will continue to do so.

[*Translation*]

We encourage the Canadian Wheat Board to work with us in order to ensure a smooth transition toward marketing freedom in the best interest of the industry. We hope that the Wheat Board will continue to work with the many other stakeholders, such as brokers, buyers, sellers, inland terminals, export elevators, and the ports, not to mention the very large marketing network.

However, regardless of whether the Canadian Wheat Board participates, as we move toward marketing freedom, our government will continue to make every effort to ensure that everything is clear and certain for farmers and for the entire value chain during the transition period.

Our government is aware that the town of Churchill, which depends on the Canadian Wheat Board's grain shipments, may be affected by the industry's transition to an open market.

● (1235)

[*English*]

Our government understands the importance of the port of Churchill as a valuable asset, and has demonstrated its support and commitment to the north.

As part of the ongoing commitment to farmers and the importance of the port as the Prairies-Arctic gateway to the world, our government will provide an economic incentive of up to \$5 million per year over the five year transition period to support shipments of grain, including oilseeds, pulses and special crops through the port.

The government will also provide support through funding of up to \$4.1 million over three years to sustain infrastructure improvements and maintenance of the port during the transition period.

In addition, the deadline will be extended to 2015 for projects to be funded through an agreement with the Churchill Gateway Development Corporation. We are looking at a number of initiatives to continue to diversify the economy of Churchill.

We are also working with stakeholders across the agriculture industry, as well as other industries, to explore development opportunities for the port. We recognize that this major change brings with it not only many benefits, but also some challenges, and we do not shy away from these challenges. We share Canadians' concerns about job loss, the port of Churchill, and our short line railways and producer cars.

Government Orders

Mike Ogborn, managing director of OmniTRAX, the company which owns the Churchill port facility and the Hudson Bay Railway Company, told *The Western Producer* on July 14 that OmniTRAX is optimistic about the future of Churchill's port and railway. OmniTRAX understands how the change to an open market may be a challenge. But more significantly, the company sees it as an opportunity for economic diversity and for growth.

Our government is confident that Canadian grain companies will continue to use the port as long as it remains a competitive method of transporting their grain. Our government is also committed to improving rail service for agriculture shippers through the rail service review.

Further, the right to producer cars is protected in the Canada Grain Act. Currently, the CWB manages the marketing of grain shipped in producer cars, so that shipments are related to a sale.

Under the new rules, producers and short lines will be able to make commercial arrangements with grain companies or the voluntary CWB to market their grain. Short line railways are expecting some adjustments as they will have more options of marketing partners for the grain volumes they can attract from producers.

While we see some job losses for Manitoba initially, the future looks very bright. We can expect more processors to start up new businesses in that province, which is my home province, and across western Canada.

Milling firms will be able to purchase directly from the farmer of their choice, at whatever price they negotiate. Entrepreneurs will have the option of starting up their own small specialty flour mills and pasta plants. Just over the border from Manitoba in North Dakota many new pasta plants have sprung up and created jobs that should have been created in the Prairies. This, along with increased trade, has the potential to create many jobs.

[Translation]

Our government is confident that farmers will make marketing choices based on what is best for their own businesses. We want to put the farmers back in the driver's seat so that they can continue to drive our economy. We think an open, competitive grain market has room for a viable, voluntary pooling option. We are ready to work with the Canadian Wheat Board to chart the way forward.

Marketing freedom was a cornerstone of our election platform from day one and was included in last spring's Speech from the Throne. Grain farmers in western Canada want the same marketing freedom and the same opportunities as other farmers in Canada and the rest of the world. With this freedom, grain farmers will be able to sell their products based on what is best for their own businesses.

I am proud that we are keeping our long-standing promise to give western Canadian grain farmers the freedom to market their own grain.

I urge hon. members to give this bill some serious thought and to keep in mind that its timely enactment will help give farmers the certainty they need to plan for next year. What is more, it will give our clients here in Canada and in the rest of world the assurance that

they can still count on the regular supply of high-quality Canadian wheat and barley.

I welcome any questions from my colleagues.

● (1240)

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech and I would also like to congratulate her on her work on the Standing Committee on Finance.

With regard to the debates, cutting the time allocated for debate and, consequently, allowing less time for speeches is an attack on democracy. There has been another attack on democracy in this matter. The Conservatives promised to listen to farmers and to hold a plebiscite. Can the hon. member tell us why the government is not interested in listening to farmers and holding a vote on the future of the board?

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague. It is truly a pleasure to work with him on the Standing Committee on Finance, and I appreciate his question. I would like to make it clear that farmers across Canada have been discussing this bill for years. We consulted western farmers many times about this matter. We even stated in our election platform that we would move forward on this issue. For that reason, most seats in the Conservative caucus are held by representatives of regions where farmers live. That is why we were elected by farmers. They were expecting us to introduce this bill to promote freedom for western farmers and farmers in other parts of the world and Canada.

[English]

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Saint Boniface took a lot of liberty with her comments on the Canadian Grain Commission and CIGI.

The fact is the Canadian Wheat Board is very much intertwined with the Canadian Grain Commission in the work they do. In fact, and I spent 10 days taking its course in the city of Winnipeg, the Canadian Wheat Board started CIGI.

Will the member not just admit that both those institutions, with the destruction of the Canadian Wheat Board's single desk selling, will be in jeopardy if the bill moves ahead?

Government Orders

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Mr. Speaker, with regards to destruction, it was most destructive that the Liberal Party did not put forward these measures when it was in power for 13 years. It is most destructive that a member who resides in Atlantic Canada, whose farmers have freedom of choice to market their grain in any way they desire, would stand here and destroy the hopes and dreams of farmers in western Canada, who have been waiting and begging for this. The member takes this moment to somehow change all the questions that he puts to the House to make it appear as if he is actually concerned about western farmers. I call bull on that.

When we talk about freedom and fairness, we cannot trust the Liberals to put forward any freedom or fairness for our western farmers.

• (1245)

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, coming from the province of Manitoba, I have not yet been able to figure out why members from Quebec, Ontario and Atlantic Canada are making these strident comments in respect to the defence of the Wheat Board, which only impacts farmers in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and a small part of British Columbia. They do not want to see the same system imposed on their farmers. Why is that? Is it for the economic advantage of their farmers to the detriment of the farmers in my riding?

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for his hard work in this place. I reiterate what the minister just stated.

The Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism stood just moments ago and asked the member for Malpeque why he was not willing, if he really believed in this policy, to put forward a national Wheat Board that would make Atlantic farmers in his home community succumb to this arbitrary and restrictive pooling and selling of wheat through only the Wheat Board.

The member for Malpeque knows very well that if he were to do that, he probably would not be re-elected. That is what almost happened when he did not support the gun registry abolition that he had promised to do away back when he was first in the House.

[Translation]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleagues for their excellent speeches, and I want to join them in defending the interests of farmers in western Canada.

After all the discussion we have heard so far on Bill C-18, I am sad to see that the government is undermining the principle of democracy by not honouring its commitments. The government was clear: it would not attempt to dismantle the Canadian Wheat Board without first consulting its members.

To respect the democratic process, we must ensure that members of the Canadian Wheat Board have the right to decide their own destiny through a referendum. Excessive political interference has no place in a democratic country like Canada. Unfortunately, I am no longer surprised to see that every day, the Conservative government uses misinformation to get what it wants. In fact, in its own press release on the bill to dismantle the Canadian Wheat Board, the government said that it had consulted with stakeholders from across the value chain before making a decision. Does this mean that

farmers, including all those who want to keep the board, are not part of the value chain for their own products, since they were not consulted?

If western farmers are part of this value chain, why did the government not listen to the majority that spoke out during the plebiscite? Why is it turning a deaf ear? I am sure that western farmers will be shocked to hear that this government has excluded them altogether from the value chain for the products they have produced by the sweat of their brow and that it does not want to hear their opinion.

Also in the news release, the government explains that, and I quote:

[it] has listened to individual farmers who just want the chance to succeed by being able to sell their wheat, durum and barley at the time and to the buyer of their choice.

But what about those who want to sell their wheat, durum and barley through the Wheat Board desk? Were they also heard, or were they deliberately kept out of the discussions because their wishes were at odds with the government's intentions? The government is ignoring these people and, meanwhile, is outrageously continuing to impose its ideology, erode democracy and misinform the public.

I would also like to use my time to discuss the idea of majority, which has already been widely discussed in relation to this bill. I want to make sure that the hon. members across the way understand the concept.

Indeed, they appear to have a good grasp of the concept here in the House, ever since May 2, but the meaning of respecting the principle of a majority seems to become a little fuzzy when it comes time to talk about the issues they want to tackle. To set the record straight, I think we need to take a closer look at the numbers together: 22,764 wheat farmers voted to maintain the board as is, compared to 14,059 farmers who voted to end the monopoly. That works out to a majority of 62% against 38%.

People who respect a majority decision respect the principles of democracy, an example that this government could learn from. In an open letter, the Conservative government, in the person of the Minister of Agriculture, explained that the vote in last May's federal election gave the necessary legitimacy to advocates of change. Can someone explain to me how a federal election can legitimately interfere politically in an organization that is managed, controlled and funded entirely by western farmers, one that is not a crown corporation? Since when do election results legitimize and govern any unilateral actions the government wants to take without any consultation or impact studies and without listening to the people, even though we live in a democracy?

Is it because they have a majority? Oh, yes; they respect that majority scrupulously. It is the same old story: another double standard.

• (1250)

In addition to this so-called legitimacy, the other point that should be mentioned here is the lawfulness of the act itself.

The laws currently in effect require Ottawa to consult the directors of the Canadian Wheat Board before amending the act that created the board. The potential dismantling of the board without prior consultation is a direct violation of this act.

I am very sorry to see that we have before us a government that legitimizes its actions, which are not based on any valid foundation or democratic principle.

In the speech he gave several weeks ago now, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board even went so far as to say that it was time to put an end to the tyranny of the Canadian Wheat Board.

On this side of the House—the NDP side—we maintain that, instead, it is time to put an end to the tyranny of the government, which went so far as to outrageously cut off the necessary debate on this bill, as it has been constantly doing since the beginning of this session of Parliament.

I am the member for the riding of Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles. The members opposite may be wondering why a member from Quebec would stand up for the interests of people who are so far from her riding. To that, I say that one would have to be pretty glib not to understand that the mechanisms of the world economy are felt from one end of the country to the other and throughout the world.

Any bad economic decisions that are made for western Canadian agriculture will affect the entire country. The negotiating power lost with the dismantling of the Canadian Wheat Board will weaken the position of western farmers on the world market.

This weak negotiating power to sell our Canadian wheat at the best possible price on the market will eliminate the smallest producers to the benefit of the large multinational grain companies. Less negotiating power for the sale of Canadian wheat means our wheat will be sold at a lower price. Selling at a lower price means less income for our families and farmers. This vulnerability will be felt throughout Canada, not just in the west.

Canada's economic health is an issue we must deal with together so that all Canadian households get what they deserve—a prosperous future.

In conclusion, the NDP is demanding no less of the government than respect for the democratic process so that western farmers can have an independent say when it comes to their own future and their own destiny.

The NDP will proudly stand up for farming families in western Canada and will listen to what they have to say, demanding nothing short of abandoning Bill C-18, which does not address the needs of the public and which is completely out of touch with Canada's current economic reality.

And closer to home, the Quebec families I represent today will unanimously support the families in western Canada in their fight to protect their income, their retirement and, ultimately, Canada's economy.

● (1255)

[English]

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that during this debate a couple of ministers have tried to sway the discussion away from the democratic principle that is at stake, and that is why farmers were not given the right to a vote, which was legislated. What is at stake, as I asked the parliamentary secretary earlier, is whether there is a choice between single desk and the open market under the new Wheat Board, and we know there is not. The single desk no longer exists.

The province of Quebec has two single desk marketing agencies, the maple syrup board and beef, I believe. What does she think would happen in Quebec if government, without a say and without proper hearings, took the right away to have the single desk, without people being given a voice?

[Translation]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question.

We firmly believe that in unity, there is strength. That is a principle of economics 101. As soon as a bill like this is introduced, it becomes dangerous. If the framework is dismantled, small producers lose the ability to work together to get a better price. The same thing will happen to maple syrup and eggs with the supply management bill. In the end, families and small farmers in the west will pay the price. And in Quebec, our farmers will soon pay the price.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to congratulate my colleague on her speech. She just spoke about the fact that producers have a right to organize and said that in unity, there is strength. Will the dismantling of the Canadian Wheat Board not deal a blow to small producers, who benefited from a single desk? Does the member think that small producers will benefit from the government's decision?

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Mr. Speaker, I personally believe that the small producers will suffer the most from this bill when it comes into force. Companies like Cargill will benefit from the legislation.

Earlier, the hon. member spoke about improving infrastructure—ports and railways. Why not do this for other existing infrastructure that is in dire need?

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I really enjoyed the speech that my colleague just gave on the Canadian Wheat Board, especially the parts about democracy and the impact on Quebec.

I represent a riding where the land is nearly 80% agricultural and where all of the farmers stand together. Currently, 38,000 western Canadian farmers voted to keep the Canadian Wheat Board's single desk—that represents 62% of those who use it—yet the government has still decided to dismantle the Canadian Wheat Board.

Does my colleague feel this decision is democratic? Could she delve a bit deeper and make some additional comments on this subject?

Government Orders

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Mr. Speaker, to use a term that is floating around a lot right now, I want to say that there are many people who are outraged. The people involved in the occupy movements in Toronto, Montreal and Wall Street are all outraged. And there are members here who are outraged at this obvious mockery of democracy. A law exists and the government is not above the law. It must consult with farmers; that is the law. Once the law changes, if it is no longer obliged to consult farmers, then it will not have to do so. But right now, it must comply with the current law and it must consult them.

• (1300)

[English]

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak to this historic legislation which is opening such an exciting time for farmers in my home province of Manitoba and right across western Canada.

Contrary to what the members opposite think or say, our government was elected on a platform to deliver marketing freedom to farmers, and we are following through on that with this legislation.

As other members have already said, this bill will end the Canadian Wheat Board's monopoly over the sales of wheat, durum and barley in western Canada. It will give wheat and barley farmers across western Canada the same rights that farmers in Ontario and the rest of Canada enjoy.

It is interesting how members on this side of the House present this debate versus how members opposite present the debate. All the members opposite ever talk about is process. I am not going to comment on the process that they are criticizing. What we focus on is results, good policy creating good results for western Canadian farmers and rural communities.

Policy is very important. The focus of this government on good policy that will generate real and tangible results is the right thing to do.

The removal of the monopoly will allow farmers to sell their grains directly to a processor, whether it be a pasta manufacturer or a flour mill, or any other venture that adds value at the farm gate. That not only grows businesses for the farmers, it creates new jobs for the rural economy.

I am being approached with increasing frequency by constituents who have terrific value-added ideas for what they can implement after the Wheat Board monopoly has been changed. In fact, just last week during the break week, two young entrepreneurs approached me with a very exciting plan to build a microbrewery in my constituency. I can hear applause from all across the chamber, and I can understand why.

These young constituents are the kind of creative entrepreneurs that Manitoba, western Canada and all of Canada need. Two young men with a great idea want to make a difference for their communities. They specifically pointed out to me that the removal of the CWB monopoly is the trigger that is going to make their enterprise work. They are very excited.

We in rural western Canada simply cannot continue to export jobs south of the border to places like North Dakota. An open wheat market will bring jobs back to the west and to cities like Winnipeg. This legislation will reduce costly red tape and inefficiencies, leaving farmers more time to drive our economy.

We saw a perfect example when a previous Conservative agriculture minister removed oats from the Wheat Board monopoly. Almost instantaneously Can-Oat Milling, a company in Portage La Prairie, sprang up. It is in the constituency of my good friend, the member for Portage—Lisgar.

The Can-Oat plant in Portage La Prairie employs 125 people. These are well-paying jobs in a rural community. What is really neat about Can-Oat as a company is that it has become the largest industrial processor of oats in North America. That is what happens when the creative power of entrepreneurs is unleashed.

I listened with great interest to the member for Malpeque's speech. I can refute every single thing he said with one word: canola.

What happened with canola after some very important research was done to create a crop that the marketplace really hungered for is that the production of canola on the free market and marketed through free market principles absolutely exploded. I think it has eclipsed wheat as the Cinderella crop in western Canada. Not only that, it is a very high-value crop that is marketed through the "evil grain companies" that members opposite are so quick to denigrate. Farmers are growing canola in droves, and the price right now is very high.

In addition, 30% of the canola that is produced in western Canada is processed in western Canada and represents 1,000 full-time jobs. There are more canola plants going up all the time.

• (1305)

Once the changes are made, there will be added demand from farmers for strong marketers, business analysts and other specialists in the grain trade. Even the promise of an open market is encouraging the value-added investments that I am so excited about in western Canada.

In September the Prime Minister was in Regina to celebrate the launch of the first commercially significant pasta plant for Canadian durum in the west. Members on that side talk process; we deliver results. That is the difference. This facility will create an estimated 60 new full-time jobs and 150 construction jobs.

Again, as a member who represents a rural, agricultural, western Canadian constituency, I have lived there long enough to see the population decline in many prairie rural communities. If the Wheat Board was that good, why did that occur?

I am convinced that policies that promote the export of raw product from an area really are not that good for small communities. Processing what we grow at home is what will help grow our rural economy.

Government Orders

Western Canadian processing plants are expanding for all crops, except for wheat. Now with wheat and barley, we will see this expansion and the pasta plant in Regina is just a beginning.

A very important concern for Manitoba MPs in particular and many Saskatchewan MPs too is the port of Churchill. Under this change there will be a period of adjustment for the port of Churchill, as it admittedly relies heavily on CWB grains. However, it is no secret that Canada's north is the cornerstone of our agenda. We understand the importance of the port of Churchill as a valuable asset, and it will remain the Prairies' Arctic gateway to the world.

Jim Carr, president and CEO of the Business Council of Manitoba agrees with us. He said that the business council sees Churchill as more than a port for grain, but as the Arctic gateway.

When our new bill is passed, the port of Churchill will remain an important shipping option. It is no secret that our government has already provided significant support to the port over the years, and we will continue to support it for use by businesses across the Prairies.

I have met with the Hudson Bay Route Association. Many of the municipalities in my constituency belong, and they see some tremendous opportunities.

As part of our ongoing commitment to farmers and the importance of the port as a shipping option, our government is making significant investments to ease this transition and help the port continue to be a viable northern shipping gateway.

We will provide an economic incentive of up to \$5 million per year over the five year transition period. Our government will also provide support through funding of up to \$4.1 million over three years to sustain infrastructure improvements and maintenance of the port during this transition period.

In addition, projects with the Churchill Gateway Development Corporation will be given more time to finish, with an extension of two years, or until 2015.

These significant investments are complementary to our other strategic investments, such as Transport Canada earmarking more than \$13 million to implement upgrades to the Churchill airport. This is in addition to operating the Churchill airport and subsidizing VIA Rail service.

Since 2007 the government has also committed \$20 million for rail line improvements, \$4 million for port improvements and \$1 million for marketing and development of the port.

I will finish with a quote from Mike Spence, the mayor of Churchill, who said:

I'm the type of person who is always optimistic. I'm looking in a positive direction, hoping that we'll be able to secure more grain and the port will diversify... I think we can do that.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be able to ask a government member a question, because this is an important one that we often forget to ask. It has to do with something that all Canadians have a right to know: the cost of dismantling the Canadian Wheat Board. Many numbers have been

tossed around, but I think a government member like him should be able to tell us exactly how much it will cost. Canadians have a right to know that information in order to decide if they agree with the government's position.

• (1310)

[English]

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Mr. Speaker, those of us on this side of the House certainly agree that nothing comes for free, but, having said that, the benefits of dismantling the board and allowing farmers marketing freedom will greatly outweigh any costs that may occur.

Transitions for many people and change for many organizations is difficult, but if the Wheat Board is as good as it says it is, a voluntary board where farmers will have marketing choice to either use the board or use the open market will allow the market to sort that particular decision out. Overall, there will be a net benefit to western Canada with this change.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette missed the point when he talked about canola. I figured he would stand there and thank previous Liberal governments for the public research that canola came out of. It is just too bad that the current government cut that.

I have been in the member's riding many times in a previous life as a farm leader and I know there are many farmers in that community. However, how can a backbench member of the government allow the minister, who is putting together his private fiefdom, and we need to keep in mind that this is a government-run agency, to put his hands in farmers' pockets and take \$200 million out of the contingency fund to cushion that government-run agency in the future? How can he allow the minister to pickpocket farmers in his region whose share of grain sales put that money in the contingency fund in the first place? How can he allow that to happen? Why does he not stand up and be counted?

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Mr. Speaker, members on this side of the House, especially those of us representing rural agricultural constituencies, will take a backseat to no one in defending our communities.

In terms of canola, I, too, am a strong supporter of public research and very much agree with the member that the canola story is nothing but good news, regardless of who happened to be in power at the time.

Regarding the CWB contingency fund, it has always been separate from the pool accounts. Mr. Oberg, the current chair of the CWB, has already wasted millions of farmers' money on his personal political agenda. It is truly unclear what liabilities he will leave behind with his scorched earth policy. We took this prudent measure to protect the future of western Canadian farmers and Canadian taxpayers.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member caught my attention when he mentioned the magic words "artisanal brewery" earlier in his comments. I want to return to that because it is a subject that is close to my heart and, based on experience, is close to the hearts of one or two other members in the House as well.

Government Orders

The creation of a differentiated value-added product that comes from an agricultural base, like microbrewed or artisanal beer, is fundamentally based on a differentiated original product, a high value product that is not mass produced or commodified. That is true whether it is grapes for wine, we all understand that, apples for cider, rice for sake, and it is equally true when it is grain for beer.

I am guessing that the member believes that the opening of a free market will allow for a greater differentiation of that original product, adding money into the pockets of farmers and also allowing for the greater participation of people like craft brewers. I would be interested in his comments on that.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Mr. Speaker, my hon. friend is exactly correct. Specialization and selling it to niche markets and doing things that no one else is doing is the way to success for a small business.

I have been privy to some commercial secrets from some constituents of mine, so I cannot talk too specifically, but we have a market now that is searching for authenticity. Therefore, prairie homegrown grains, making a niche, outstanding micro-products that can only be purchased in one or two spots will be very attractive in this new marketplace.

• (1315)

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to stand proudly with our farmers and my party in opposition to this very bad bill that would dismantle the Canadian Wheat Board.

In recent weeks, we have seen the powerful symbol of farmers with tape on their mouths to symbolize that the Conservative government is not listening to them. However, we, in this party, along with others, have heard our farmers. Here in Ottawa and across the prairies, farmers are rising to say no to this. It is time to stop this Conservative steamroller that is bent on doing the bidding of the agribusiness giant corporations.

Western farmers are being taken for granted. As my hon. colleagues from Churchill and Winnipeg have said, the recent CWB plebiscite indicated that a majority of farmers are opposed to the Conservative plan. The Conservative arrogance of not supporting those farmers is an indication of the way in which the government is failing to listen to western voices.

Sadly, we see the Conservative arrogance on too many files here in Ottawa and across the country.

I saw the Conservative arrogance when I was in Washington this week. Incredibly, the Conservatives were expressing their outrage that elected members of Parliament in a democratic country were there to tell Americans that there were better alternatives for our economy and the environment than the Keystone project.

I would like to add that, since I was in Washington, I have received numerous emails from Americans thanking us for bringing the Canadian voice, the real Canadian voice, to Washington.

We see the Conservatives' arrogance and hypocrisy in defending provincial rights until provinces tell them that they are wrong about their law and order bills or wrong in destroying the data of the long gun registry.

I would like to use my time here today to speak to what this bill would do to farmers and what would be a fair position to take for our farmers. As an Ontario MP, I will also talk about how illogical it is to use what happened with the wheat farmers in Ontario and what might happen now to the prairie farmers without the CWB.

Bill C-18 proposes to dismantle the farmer controlled and funded Canadian Wheat Board by eliminating the single desk marketing of wheat and barley in Canada. Just like the provinces, when the farmers disagree with the government, they are given no choice whatsoever with respect to their decision on the CWB.

The Conservatives claim that this would benefit farmers by opening the market for them and giving them choice. This flies in the face of all the evidence we have now, with the depressed economy and market debt left behind. Left alone, it would wreak havoc on our farmers. The bill is reckless. It would spell economic hardship for prairie farmers during these tough economic times.

It is beyond me why any government representing Canadians would side with the interests of large American grain companies and assist in eroding prices and eroding market security for our own farmers.

The farmers in western Canada are much like the farmers in my own riding of Nickel Belt. They do not expect or want a free ride. They work very hard. They want to be in their fields farming, with a market that is fair to all and not to only a few. They have a right to expect fairness from the Canadian government.

Canadian farmers want to be heard. They have the right to be listened to.

In a time of economic instability, the federal government is jeopardizing \$5 billion in exports and forcing grain farmers into an open market without the Wheat Board's protection.

Bill Gehl, a Saskatchewan farmer and chairperson of the non-partisan farm group, the Canadian Wheat Board Alliance, has said, "local food advocates should be concerned about the end of the Canadian Wheat Board".

Gehl went on to explain:

Today Canadians can be confident that the grain in all the bread, pasta, and most of the beer they consume is still grown by Canadian farmers. However, if [the Prime Minister] succeeds in killing our Wheat Board, private corporations will then control our basic food stocks and will simply buy the cheapest grain they can from any source.

• (1320)

As an Ontario MP, I want to comment on the argument made by some Conservatives that the Ontario experience with removing the single desk can be applied to western farmers. This is truly illogical. It is comparing apples to oranges. We need to be clear: Ontario wheat farmers ended their single desk through a farmer-led democratic process.

Ontario wheat farmers produce wheat that is used for pastries, cookies and cakes and has a ready market available locally. They produce less than one-tenth of the volume of wheat that prairie farmers produce. Ontario wheat farmers sell about 90% of their product within Canada or to northern U.S.A. They have low transportation distances and costs. Worst of all, Ontario wheat farmers now pay grain companies more to handle their crops.

On the other hand, prairie wheat farmers voted in favour of keeping the CWB and face having it taken away against their will. Prairie wheat farmers produce hard red spring wheat used for bread and durum used for pasta, which does not have an extensive local market.

A crucial difference in terms of understanding the impact of this bad bill is that the prairie wheat farmers produce 80% of Canada's wheat. They also must pay freight costs to transport grain long distances to inland terminals and to ports. Prairie wheat farmers rely on the CWB to ensure fair market access for all, including users of producer cars.

[Translation]

Our position is clear: the NDP believes that any decision on the future of the board should be made by farmers for farmers. Grain farmers have expressed their opinion: a majority of them want to keep this single desk system. The bill should be withdrawn. Before any changes are made to the board, the government must study the impact of dismantling it and examine the effect this will have on Canadian grain farmers. Otherwise, it is gambling with the prairie economy and the income of western farmers.

Allen Orberg, a farmer and chair of the Canadian Wheat Board's board of directors, said that this government does not have a plan, has done no analysis and did not even consult farmers. He also said that the government's approach is based solely on its blind commitment to free markets. Yet here it is, about to dismantle, in just a few months, a marketing system that has been working very well for 75 years.

[English]

The facts are clear: the CWB mitigates a risk for farmers. It helps determine when and if they will get paid on time, whether they are selling their grain to the right buyer on the right day and how to get their grain to the buyer, which is a significant issue given the vastness of the prairies.

Farmers pay for the operations of the CWB from their revenue. The CWB is not a government agency or a crown corporation. It is not funded by taxpayers.

There is the example of Australia to know what is in store for our farmers when the single desk is eradicated. This is alarming to say the least. When the Australian wheat board had its single desk power, Australian wheat commanded premiums of over \$99 a tonne over American wheat. However, by December 2008, it had dropped to a discount of \$27 per tonne below U.S. wheat. In three short years, 40,000 wheat farmers in Australia, which had 12% of the world's wheat production worth about \$5 billion, went from running their own grain marketing system and selling virtually all of their wheat on their own behalf to being mere customers of Cargill.

Government Orders

I recognize this bill for what it is: Conservative ideology and politics trumping what is best for our farmers and best for Canada. The CWB is currently controlled, operated and funded by farmers for farmers and the government is meddling where it is not wanted. This bill must be defeated.

• (1325)

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my hon. colleague from Nickel Belt on a very informed and thoughtful speech.

We are talking about the Canada Wheat Board and the merits of keeping it. We have heard passionate arguments on both sides of the House, but the key question for me comes down to what the farmers of western Canada want. We know that the legislation requires that a plebiscite be held for those farmers to tell us what they want.

I have two questions. First, why will the government not honour that legislation and allow farmers to have a vote so we will know once and for all what the farmers of western Canada want, instead of hearing people say what they want?

Second, did the Conservatives, during the last election campaign, tell the farmers of western Canada that they would get rid of the Canadian Wheat Board without a vote?

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Mr. Speaker, farmers have already indicated through their own plebiscite that they want to keep the Canadian Wheat Board, but the government does not want to bring it to a vote because it would lose that vote. I just told the member why the government does not want to bring it to a vote. It does not want to bring the issue to a vote because surely it will lose the vote and then lose face with the farmers in western Canada.

Just a while ago the member for Saint Boniface said that MPs from Quebec, Ontario and British Columbia should not be defending these farmers because we do not represent them, but the last time I was in Saint Boniface I noticed that there are no farmers there. We were elected to represent all Canadians.

The Conservative government should bring this to a vote so farmers can have their say.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member's answer was right on the money. The government will not allow a vote for the simple reason it knows it would lose the vote. It is that simple. The government has really violated every democratic principle in order to not allow that vote. It brought in a law to basically break the law, get around the law.

Private Members' Business

What is important to Canadians is, are we not really witnessing a government using its majority in the pathological belief that it can impose freedom by suppressing democracy? The Conservatives talk about freedom but they have taken away the freedom to have a vote on a farmer's specific institution.

Is the government really imposing freedom by suppressing democracy, and not really getting to freedom at all?

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Mr. Speaker, I would like to first comment on the government's majority. We all know that 39% of Canadians who voted, voted for the government. That is not the majority of Canadians.

To answer the other part of the member's question I would like to quote from an email that I received from the acting executive minister of the United Church:

[T]here wouldn't be any attempt to impose dual marketing on the CWB unless a majority of producers voted for it. According to the CWB, [the minister said,] "Until farmers make that change, I'm not prepared to work arbitrarily.... They [farmers] are absolutely right to believe in democracy. I do, too".

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I cannot stop laughing down at this end because of some of the comments that are being made by the opposition.

We had a vote on May 2 on this.

Believe it or not, I represent the oil sands but there are a huge number of farms in my area. Seventy to eighty per cent of those people vote and seventy to eighty per cent vote for the Conservative Party. They have clearly indicated to me that they do not want people in Ontario, Quebec, southern British Columbia and P.E.I. telling them where to sell their grain because those people get to decide where they want to sell their grain. They feel prejudiced. In Alberta, 27 out of 28 seats are held by Conservatives and they won by 70% to 80%.

I am going to ask the member for Nickel Belt how he would feel if the roles were reversed. If his constituents were told where they could sell their nickel and all of the rest of the producers in Canada could sell wherever they wanted, how would his constituents feel about that?

● (1330)

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Mr. Speaker, I am glad that the member mentioned the election on May 2. I would like to remind him again that the Conservatives were elected by 39% of the Canadians who voted. That is a long way from a majority.

I would like to quote from an email that I received from a farmer in Saskatchewan, of all places. This is from Dianne and Ken: "We are cereal and pulse growers operating 1,800 acres in southwest Saskatchewan. We have been permit holders for 43 years and have been certified organic for 19 years. We support the Canadian Wheat Board single desk selling of Canadian grains for the following reasons".

I am sorry I cannot give the member the reasons. My time appears to be up.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): It being 1:30 p.m. the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

NATIONAL FLAG OF CANADA ACT

Mr. John Carmichael (Don Valley West, CPC) moved that Bill C-288, An Act respecting the National Flag of Canada, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to have the opportunity to rise today and to speak to my Bill C-288, An Act respecting the National Flag of Canada, a bill that encourages Canadians to proudly display our national flag.

This bill represents an opportunity for us to stand behind those who wish to display our most important national symbol.

It also allows us to demonstrate to Canadians who wish to display our national flag that they have our full support. There have been far too many Canadians who have been forced to take down the Canadian flag on Canadian soil.

Some of us will remember our flag being adopted in 1965. Since that time, Canadians have proudly worn it on their backpacks while travelling the world. Displaying our flag abroad has immediately conveyed the values that we hold dear, freedom, democracy, courage and justice. Everywhere Canadians go, our flag is recognized and respected.

Despite proudly displaying our national flag when we are away from home, it is often said that Canadians are reserved in their patriotism and that they are not likely to put on a grand display of pride for their country.

I agree that in the past we have been hesitant to acknowledge our accomplishments, but Canada has come of age. As a country we have matured. We are no longer reserved about trumpeting our many accomplishments and letting the world know about our great country.

Our flag represents freedom, democracy, courage and justice, but today we are also proud to display our national flag as a symbol of leadership in the world and as a symbol of our accomplishments as Canadians.

The purpose of the bill is to protect Canadian citizens who want to proudly display the Canadian flag at their home. There are many reasons why one would want to display the flag; simply though, Canada is a great country.

When I hear stories of veterans who have been displaying the flag for years and are forced to take it down on threat of fines or even evictions, I am appalled.

There are stories such as those of Guy Vachon from Ottawa who served 25 years in the army, including combat in Korea, or Fred Norman, also from Ottawa, who served under our flag for 23 years. They were forced to take down their flags on threat of eviction. Mr. Vachon flew a Canadian flag for 11 years without a problem. Then one day he was told that unless he took down his flag he would face legal action with potential eviction.

There is the story of Brian and Linda-Lee Cassidy from southern Ontario who have been flying the flag for almost 40 years at their homes. They were told their flag looked like "trailer trash", both an insult to the flag and the people who live in mobile homes. The Cassidys are now members in bad standing at their homeowners association even though they have always paid their dues and followed the rules. The Cassidys want to fly the Canadian flag because they simply love Canada. They believe in what this country represents and they are honoured to be Canadians.

There is Rose Wittemann and Richard Field. Rose wanted to fly the flag because her brother was being sent to Afghanistan to fight under the Canadian flag for the freedom that we enjoy every day. They were told that unless they took down their flag, maintenance workers would come and take it down for them and they would be charged for the work that took place. In the notice they were given they were told:

While we appreciate your patriotism, Canada Day has now passed and we require that the flag be removed immediately.

• (1335)

Canadians should have the right to fly the flag on more than just Canada Day. We are Canadians every day of the year and we should be allowed to fly the Canadian flag every day of the year.

Lynn Riley hung a flag on her backyard fence. Shortly thereafter she received a letter from a legal firm representing her condo association, forcing her into expensive mediation.

Ex-serviceman Mark Murray placed his flag on his balcony in remembrance of the men and women he served with and those who never came home. He has received encouragement from family members of those who lost their lives to keep flying the flag. He faced eviction as a result but Mark said, "Remembering those who were lost was well worth it".

Or there is Kirk Taylor in Calgary who also believed in what the flag represented. He received a notice to take down his flag but he refused. The issue took years to resolve, including expensive mediation.

Thousands of Canadians risk their lives every year with the Canadian Forces for the sake of what the flag represents. They risk it all for Canada. Why would we force them to fight more battles here at home while trying to remember those who are still fighting or those who never came home?

We all have special memories that involve the Canadian flag. This summer, I was inspired whenever I had the opportunity to go to an immigration ceremony to welcome new Canadian citizens. When these new citizens would stand up I would give each one a small Canadian flag, a symbol, and they would often be overwhelmed with emotion and tears. I was reminded repeatedly that Canada is a refuge, a safe place, where millions of people all over the world desire to live. Our Canadian flag represents everything that they strive for: freedom, democracy, justice and many more attributes that we take for granted every day.

If hon. members think back over the past number of years, can we say that Canadians were shy about displaying our flag during the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games? Of course not. Our flag was visible everywhere. It was proudly displayed by Canadians from

coast to coast to coast for the entire world to see. Canadians expressed their immense pride in their athletes and that was even before they owned the podium for Canada. Of course, they were not just proud of Sidney Crosby's winning goal, they were proud that Canada had once again welcomed the world with such tremendous distinction.

We do not only show our pride in our flag at sporting events. Canadians proudly display our flag during times of national celebration. Of course we can think of Canada Day. On July 1 every year, Canada is transformed into a sea of red and white. Our flag can be seen flying in every town and city across the country. Flag Day on February 15 also comes to mind.

However, we also saw our flag waving all over the country to welcome Their Royal Highnesses The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge this past summer. We all know that a tour from our Queen would not be complete without the familiar red and white flag lining the streets to greet her. Certainly, Canadians will be eager to display our flag in celebration of Her Majesty's diamond jubilee in 2012. As Canadians, we have much to celebrate. No symbol can match the unifying power of our flag to help us celebrate together.

Our flag represents us overseas as well. It flies at our embassies and missions around the world and it is a beacon of hope for people around the world when it flies with the Canadian Forces in areas such as Afghanistan.

Canadians are tremendously proud of their flag and want to see it displayed both at home and abroad. Canadians want to show their pride in their country every day of the year. They want to show their support for our democracy, freedom, courage and justice.

• (1340)

Our national flag is our greatest symbol. Around the world it stands for those values. It accompanies the men and women in uniform who go out into the world and risk all for the sake of that democracy.

Our flag unites us all. It honours our history, shows our pride in our accomplishment and brings us together in time of celebration and in times of mourning. Canadians want to be able to display it proudly and should always be able to do so.

The bill would help Canadians who want to show their pride in Canada. Canadians like Guy Vachon, Fred Norman, Brian and Linda Cassidy, Rose Wittemann and Richard Field, Lynne Reilly, Mark Murray, Kirk Taylor and so many others just like them. They have all sacrificed so much for the sake of our flag, for the sake of what our country stands for.

As their elected representatives, we have a responsibility to support Canadians who want to show their love of our great country. We must encourage Canadians to display our national flag and send a message that no one should prevent it from being displayed respectfully. What better way to do so than to make it easier for Canadians to display our national flag every day of the year.

Private Members' Business

For this reason, I urge members to join me and support Bill C-288. I also urge members, if they have not already done so, to join me and other Canadians in showing our pride and in celebration of our great country by displaying the national flag of Canada at our homes.

Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question for the hon. member for Don Valley West is this. How would making people criminals forward the democracy that the flag represents? How would it help the individuals, who the member has mentioned, fly their flag by making other individuals criminals?

Mr. John Carmichael: Mr. Speaker, that is a good question.

We need to take the bill to committee. My goal is to see some amendments come forward that would reduce that element of the bill. Importantly, I hope to create a dialogue between those who wish to fly the flag and those condominium associations or ratepayer associations about the right of people to fly the flag.

It is certainly not my intention to create disparity between the two sides. I want to see a unity in this that creates an environment where we come together as Canadians and agree that this is the right thing to do, both on the side of the building owners or condominium associations and those who wish to fly the flag.

• (1345)

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the words of the member for Don Valley West. I agree with much of what he had to say about pride in Canada, what the flag represented and how important it was to Canadians.

I am an immigrant who came to Canada and I have immense pride in the flag. The Liberal Party has immense pride in our red and white flag that it brought forward for Canadians to be proud of over the years. However, what is mystifying to me is how one converts those words around pride, freedom and democracy into the creation of a condo board inspector team to check on the decisions being made about this.

While I appreciate there might be some changes to the bill, the last thing we want is the flag police. That is antithetical to freedom and would get in the way of people's inherent right to exercise their democratic freedom with respect to the flag as well.

Mr. John Carmichael: Mr. Speaker, nowhere was the pride in our flag more evident than in her riding during the 2010 Olympics. We saw the flags lining the streets of Vancouver and that area.

Like the hon. member, it is not my wish nor my goal to see flag police. This is not about that. This is about creating a dialogue.

It is my hope that opposition parties will join me in taking this to committee where we can develop a group of amendments that would truly make a unifying bill, not a divisive bill. It is my hope that the hon. member will join me in this effort.

[Translation]

Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my colleague, whom I would also like to congratulate. I would like to know his thoughts on the following subject.

I wonder what he thinks of civil society organizations that receive public subsidies, money from Canadian taxpayers, and refuse to fly the Canadian flag?

[English]

Mr. John Carmichael: Mr. Speaker, the purpose of the bill is to create a unifying environment where we can create a dialogue in which we can talk about what it will take to bring both sides together. I support the initiative of those who want to fly the flag at their homes, on their balconies, et cetera. That is the core of what we are talking about today.

Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one of my staffers became a citizen of the country Wednesday. I wanted to join her in Montreal when this happened, but was unable to. She shared her pride with me on becoming a citizen. Some 400 individuals became new Canadian citizens at her ceremony, representing some 64 different nationalities, I believe.

I, like so many of us, am an immigrant. I moved here from England when I was child. My parents moved here from Barbados via England. We all hold an immense pride in our country and the flag that represents it.

For clarity's sake, our flag is an enduring symbol of unity, freedom and national purpose, which is rightly celebrated by all Canadians, regardless of their origin or political affiliation. It stands as a powerful testament to the sacrifices of generations who gave their all to ensure our future and to build and preserve our democracy.

Recent events around the world, such as in Libya and Syria, the Sudan, remind us how precious freedom is and the profound sacrifice that is required to assure its survival. That profound sacrifice, however, does not preclude the freedom that the bill represents, which includes the right to speak out and the right to not have the flag raised. I would hope, and I think we all hope, that common sense prevails in situations like this.

Canada's official opposition enthusiastically supports the right of every citizen to display our national flag with pride, as it represents the freedom of expression this bill seems to want to curtail.

We commend the member for wanting to ensure that Canadians who wished to show their connection to Canada would not be unduly hindered in their expression.

Jail time, fines, this is the type of heavy-handed punitive vision that clouds the obviously honourable intent of the member for Don Valley West. However, I must confess that in my daily interaction with my constituents and citizens from across the country, the pressing issues I hear from them are on the economic, social and environmental fronts, to name a few. I am not hearing anything about issues regarding their right to display our flag.

The member for Don Valley West has shared some of the stories that he has heard from his constituents, and I thank him for that. However, that in itself shows the isolated nature of this issue, an issue that should be dealt with at a municipal and/or provincial level, where it belongs.

Canadians who wish to express their support for their country are protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights under the freedom of expression. If through some municipal bylaw, or provincial legislation or even condo bylaw an individual's freedom of expression is being challenged, then there is recourse through municipal means, through the Charter of Rights, through provincial means. Is it really necessary to turn a hapless caretaker, following through on a condo bylaw on behalf of a condo board, into a criminal with threatened jail time?

I cannot help but be reminded that the bill is eerily similar in substance and spirit to a much maligned American law, the Freedom to Display the American Flag Act, which was introduced in 2005 by Roscoe Bartlett, who incidentally was a founding member of the Republican tea party caucus. Though hustled through Congress on the strength of a Conservative majority, the law pilloried as an opportunistic political grandstand, thus the sentiment that may have fostered the bill was lost.

• (1350)

Canadians are smart people. They are perfectly capable of finding their way through issues such as their desire to fly their flag. Does the government's hubris stretch so far as to make municipalities, fire departments and condo associations criminals when enacting their bylaws within their jurisdiction?

Respect for jurisdiction is a convenient evasion for the government when being asked uncomfortable questions on transportation or health care, but it seems that for their pet projects, jurisdiction does not matter.

Let us get to the heart of the matter. Patriotism cannot be legislated. Attempts to do so have always led to discontent. Patriotism is and always should be something that individuals arrive at when shown the honour and the heart of their nation.

The honour and heart of this nation is not simply based on military history but on the social responsibilities it has adopted over its 144 year history. A country built on the promise of democracy, inclusion and a shared goal in its building. These are a few of the elements that make us proud to be Canadians and proud to wear our flag.

The bill puts at risk that freedom, the freedom that the flag represents. Let us get back to the business of creating real middle-class jobs that are eagerly awaited, pension security and EI reform.

Canadians are crying out for real environmental agenda changes and restraints on mounting ethical abuses by the government. The government has continuously used closure and time allocation to stifle the very democracy this flag represents.

The government does not have a monopoly on patriotism and honouring men and women who fight for this country. Those valiant men and women offered up their lives and safety, so that we could live and uphold the fine democracy and traditions which have always been a source of strength to this nation.

How does the bill do that? It does not. What it does is find more reasons to throw Canadians in jail.

I hope that the words shared by the member for Don Valley West that it is not his intent are true. I hope that when the bill gets to

committee, we will be in a position to sit down, and truly discuss what the bill means and what the bill can do.

However, to make a federal case, pun slightly intended, out of an issue which should be left to municipalities, we should show municipalities and condo associations that there are other ways to deal with matters when it comes to the Canadian flag. Making these individuals criminals, forcing them to pay fines, and throwing them in jail is not the answer.

• (1355)

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, over the past couple of weeks I have looked into the ramifications of this bill quite a bit and sought out many opinions about how people feel about this. We are getting into an interesting discussion about pride in the flag. We talk about what happened in Vancouver at the Olympics. The hon. member for Vancouver Quadra knows this quite well, as was pointed out earlier. Many celebrate Canada Day as the sun breaks over the Canadian flag on Signal Hill in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador and it is certainly a moment that stops one's heart, a true Canadian heart.

I would like to make a few points that have been brought up in debate so far. These are technical matters because as I look into this bill, it is the technicalities of it that really bring it down even though it has the best of intentions.

I want to thank my hon. colleague because he is onto something with regard to the situation that happened in his riding and it certainly deserves the attention of the House.

In the beginning I may not have thought that, but as time goes on, I actually believe it does because these are people who are told they cannot do something to express pride and therefore they are diminished.

That being said, in the House we have several measures by which we can express the opinion of those who wish to be proud of their flag, and those who want to do it and not be hindered to do so. What the member is looking at is more of a private member's motion than a private member's bill because the bill takes the idea of ensuring someone has the right to fly the flag and unnecessarily penalizing people in many respects. I do not believe that was the intention of the bill to begin with.

The member talks about sending the bill to committee for the sake of making major amendments and then bringing it back, but the problem with that is that once it gets to the heritage committee, if the amendments that we make go against the principle and scope of the bill, then the Speaker would have to rule it out.

The way to get around that is to send the bill to committee before second reading, before anyone in the House says yes to it because there are many things we cannot change.

Private Members' Business

I know many people will tell me not to worry. If the committee says it wants a change, it will change. That is not how it works. If the changes go beyond the principle and scope of the bill, the Speaker has the responsibility to say we cannot do that, but the Speaker had already said yes to it.

I bring that up because some of the amendments that we choose to make to this proposed legislation, my hon. colleague from Jeanne-Le Ber in the NDP and members of the Liberal Party, really go beyond the scope of the bill in my opinion.

Back to the bill itself there is a case in point. Several years ago, by way of protest, the premier of Newfoundland and Labrador of the day, Danny Williams, ordered the provincial buildings to take down the Canadian flag. May I humbly suggest, do we send in the RCMP to the premier's office to serve an order? I bring this situation up simply because these are some of the things we may be faced with and certainly some things that changes in committee cannot get around.

There are many other aspects. For example, how have the provinces been brought into this conversation? Fundamentally, it works like this. The Attorney General of Canada makes an application in the superior court of the province and therefore provinces have to enact this. They have to ensure it is enforced. The first thing they do is to serve notice or serve a court order to tell a person not to fly the flag. If it goes beyond that, we are looking at a maximum of two years imprisonment which is particularly harsh given what we are dealing with here. In order to do that, the provinces have to carry this out. I do not know what conversations have taken place with the provinces on this piece of legislation, but it creates a myriad of responsibilities that have not been fundamentally addressed.

• (1400)

Despite the fact that we are all proud of our flag, our symbols, and our emblems, I believe that the headaches created by this would really be too much to handle right now. That is why I would have suggested the member move a private member's motion, committing this House to the flag itself and the freedom to fly the flag, and not so much to the penalty phase of it.

For example, there are so many questions that arise. I cannot stand in front members here today and hold up the Canadian flag. The Standing Orders say I cannot do that because it is a prop. Members are pointing to the flag that stands next to the Speaker. I cannot hold that flag because it is considered a prop. But it stands in its rightful place. So, there we have it. I have not been permitted to fly the flag, just as a point of reference.

Just by way of explanation, the bill has two orders. Primarily, the bill would give remedies that the court could use when someone is denied the right to fly the flag. They are restraining orders, injunctions, orders of compliance, and any such order necessary. The secondary punishments can be given at the discretion of the judge, including either a fine, the amount set at the discretion of the court, and again we go back to the provinces, or a prison term not to exceed two years.

I heard the member speak earlier about the situation he had with the condo development people. It is a good point. I do not think, in

many of these cases, these people should be allowed to prohibit someone else from flying the national flag.

What about provincial flags? It is the same story. If I am not mistaken, I believe provincial flags are also owned by the Government of Canada. So, why are provincial flags not in here as well? I would suggest that could be the case.

The province of Quebec says that the provincial government buildings are not allowed to have many emblems on them regarding the Government of Canada, if I am not mistaken. Would we go to the province of Quebec and tell it we are going to serve it with an order and a prison term not exceeding two years and so forth?

We can see the layers and the problems that we would face with this. I would respectfully say that despite the good intentions of the bill, there is nothing we could amend in committee that would ensure these intentions remain just that, good intentions, as opposed to the problems that we would create and the situations that I have illustrated here.

It was tried in the United States in 2005. There were some changes that had to go through there. The bill was brought forward by Roscoe Bartlett. He was a member of the Republican Party and a member of the tea party faction of the party, if that actually exists. In any event, that is what he claimed. There were problems similar to what we are talking about here, and my hon. colleague from Jeanne-Le Ber mentioned the same thing.

I suspect that if we were to debate it today, it should have been a motion as opposed to a bill. That is why we are voting against this right now. I think there is another way of going about doing this. The ramifications within this particular proposed legislation, despite the good intentions, are not that functional, especially when we are dealing with the fact that we have the Attorney General of Canada petitioning provinces about doing this, and they have not really been brought into the discussion, as well. I am sure they would like to see much the same for their own flags.

I thank the House for this time, and I also would like to thank the member for his good intentions.

• (1405)

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today in support of Bill C-288, a bill brought forward by our new colleague from Don Valley West, who I commend for taking up an important issue and creating a very important dialogue in the chamber. I encourage members to support this bill. It is important and I will get into the substance of it in just a moment.

My colleague from Don Valley West is new to the chamber and has done a phenomenal job of bringing this issue to bear. I think all of us in this chamber recognize the importance of our national symbols and what they mean to us and do for us. Our flag is a great symbol. It is a great expression of national unity and how we pull together. It is an expression of the values that we have in common, freedom, democracy, respecting the human rights of others and accepting that we are not ruled by the whim and dictates of an individual but we are all under the rule of law.

Those are very important values, which are not prevalent everywhere in the world, I might add, which is why a symbol, like our national flag, can become such an important point of hope for others. I am talking about others who seek to flee their own situations and come to a land of hope, such as the story of my biological mother and her oldest sister who left difficult economic conditions in eastern Europe in the late 1960s early 1970s to come to a place where there was economic hope and opportunity and the promise of starting a new life.

The flag also represents the hope and values that others wish to have in their own countries and hope to bring to their own countries some day. The flag is important because of its ability to inspire us. I am now in my eighth year as a member of Parliament, which is a great privilege, and every day when I leave this building I look up over my shoulder at the flag flying at the top of the Peace Tower and it never fails to take my breath away. It is a great thing.

I have to say that I am a little troubled by what I am hearing from the opposition with regard to this bill. The member for Jeanne-Le Ber questioned the government's priorities. First, this is a private member's bill, not a government bill. We should clarify the two right off the bat.

In terms of individual member's priorities, a bill that deals with the national flag of Canada and the right of every Canadian citizen to fly that flag is probably better than the bill introduced by the New Democrat member for Windsor West who wants to ensure that there is proper labelling for things that contain cat fur. In terms of the quantum of priorities, the right to fly a flag or to be notified if there is cat fur in a product, I know which priority I think is more important.

I have been told that the New Democrats do not see desecrating our flag as offensive. That troubles me. In fact, that disturbs me. This is not about a right to disassociate from flying the flag. This is about restoring the balance between those who are denied the right by those who are the elite seeking to deny them. That is what this bill hopes to address.

When I listen to Liberal members, I am troubled as well. This bill is not about pride. It is about being denied the free expression of that pride, which is incredibly important.

● (1410)

Listening to members' interventions brings up a curious oddity for me. Opposition members, be they New Democrats or Liberals, have no problem imposing fines and jail sentences on Canadians who do not fill out a long form census, but they will not support a bare minimum fine for someone who would urinate on the flag. That is desecrating the flag. It is in the bill. Apparently they have no problem with that, but sock it to the Canadian who does not fill out a long form census. I am astonished by that position. In fact, I am almost embarrassed that that position has been brought forward in the House, but it is their right. Notwithstanding that, I hope that members will come back to exactly what this legislation is about.

The member for Bonaville—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor said that a motion should have been brought forward and not a bill. I will remind the member that a motion would not deal with the issues that may be uncomfortable for members to deal with, like the desecration of the flag.

Private Members' Business

We are challenged with a bill today. It is not a perfect bill but it is a good bill on balance. I accept that there could be some changes to this. However, it is a step in the right direction, which is why I felt it was necessary to both second it and speak in favour of it.

I hope all members, at bare minimum, will let this legislation get to committee and, if they want to make some changes to it that are within the scope of the bill, then let us go ahead and do that. Maybe the jail sentence is too much. Fair enough. Maybe it could be the bare minimum of a fine. However, there should be something to acknowledge that Canadians have the right to fly the flag and that right should be respected.

It should not be up to a homeowners association to decide that a veteran in my community in Lake Shore cannot fly a flag over his garage because others do not like the way it looks or it violates some rule of the homeowners association. That is bunk. The bill would remedy that situation. This issue has been in the newspapers back home and the homeowners association does not care about the bad press. It thinks it is still right. I say that it is not.

We need a bill like this. People who put their lives on the line for this flag deserve to have their right backed up and they deserve to have a Parliament that will stand behind them on that.

[Translation]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to discuss Bill C-288. I want to begin by thanking the hon. member for Don Valley West for his speech and for what seems to be a commendable intention. I congratulate him. His speech was very respectful, unlike some other speeches I have heard recently in the House.

I would, however, like to talk about the flaws in the bill. We cannot really attack the intent of the bill, which is commendable. However, this is a bill that will add another clause to the Criminal Code. It is therefore a relatively serious issue and it deserves to be addressed.

The bill lists three main conditions with regard to the Canadian flag: that it be displayed in a manner befitting this national symbol, that it not be displayed for an improper purpose or use, and that it not be subjected to desecration. These are three important conditions for allowing a person to display a flag.

One of the main flaws is that there is absolutely no definition of what constitutes a manner befitting this national symbol. And what does it mean to display a flag for an improper purpose or use? Even the definition of desecration seems complex. I think we can all agree, but knowing the limits of the definition of desecration is not so obvious.

Private Members' Business

For example, much is being said about condos and homeowners' associations. We can also talk about people living in condos or rented houses who want to use a flag as a curtain. Is that an improper use of a flag? I think that if we are talking about a flag as a symbol that should be treated with respect, some people might take issue with that use. If a flag is used as a door or a curtain between two rooms, is that a proper use of the flag? Some reasonable people might not think so.

I think this bill is quite flawed in terms of how the use of the flag is defined. Although the hon. member for Don Valley West wants to ensure that this bill contributes positively to the discussion, I think it might complicate the discussion between members of homeowners' associations and condo associations.

Another aspect of this bill—making the offence in question a crime—has already been raised in this chamber. Once again, I definitely understand that the member for Don Valley West wants to improve dialogue and discussion about this matter. However, criminalizing something and taking sides in a dispute can cause problems. By passing this bill, the Government of Canada would be taking sides in any dispute involving a Canadian flag, and that would tip the balance in favour of one party over the other party, which might have legitimate objections in a dispute.

For that reason, I fully support the arguments of my colleague from Jeanne-Le Ber, who said that this type of discussion should probably take place at the municipal level, where matters pertaining to residences and property are handled. The discussion would be much more appropriate at that level. Discussions could also take place at the provincial level. However, at the federal level, we are talking about criminalizing a dispute involving a national symbol. The dispute is also about how land or property is divided, and the rules that are agreed to and applied by property owners.

I believe that the bill goes much too far by introducing criminalization and that it does not achieve the purpose intended by the member for Don Valley West, who wants to create a dialogue. In the end, it may prevent dialogue and polarize any dispute that could arise in similar cases.

I would also like to say, and this has been mentioned, that there is no flag crisis at the moment. There are isolated and regrettable incidents because the parties in a dispute about displaying the flag cannot come to an agreement. However, introducing a private member's bill that would increase criminalization or add another article to the Criminal Code is probably excessive in the circumstances.

• (1415)

Another one of the issues that was raised by the hon. member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor is the double standard.

We know full well that, based on the rules of the House, the Board of Internal Economy has already decided that flags cannot be flown in the windows of Parliament Hill offices. However, this issue was raised by a media outlet, which mentioned the existence of a double standard: one for ordinary Canadians and one for Parliament Hill.

The member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor has already pointed this out but, if we had to resolve a dispute or make a decision in this regard—as one of your predecessors did—I would

surely not like to see you be given a prison sentence of two years for a ruling contrary to the essence or intent of a bill, even though I know that members of the House benefit from parliamentary privilege.

The fundamental issue here is that there is a double standard. We cannot impose on the House what we want to impose on Canadians, specifically members of homeowners associations and condominium associations.

I would like to point out another issue, namely, that of freedom of expression. The goal is to allow people to express themselves more freely or to give them the opportunity to express their patriotism by flying the Canadian flag without anyone preventing them from doing so. It is important to realize that freedom of expression is currently protected under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Any dispute that may occur about the flying of the flag—and these are usually arguments between two or three individuals or among small groups of people—can be resolved by the mechanisms in place to ensure that the provisions of the Charter are upheld. Once again, although the intent of the bill may be commendable and although no one in this House wants to attack this intent in any way, the fact remains that the bill seeks to remedy a situation that is already covered by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Fourth—and this will be my last point—I mentioned that there was a problem with the definitions and the way in which some of the conditions set out in the bill are defined. The fact that the bill is so vague and yet so broad could result in unpredictable situations that may be a little bit embarrassing. The bill tries to cover almost any controversy that could arise, even though most of these controversies seem to pertain to very similar situations. For example, associations of homeowners or condominium owners.

I will give an example that has been brought up by the media. The current member for Vaughan on the government side was formerly the Ontario Provincial Police commissioner. Six years ago, while carrying out his duties during the incidents in Caledonia, he arrested a protester, or rather a counter-protester. This person was arrested for flying a Canadian flag during the counter-protest. According to this clause, would the member for Vaughan, while exercising his duties as Ontario Provincial Police commissioner, have been subject to punishment? Once again, I do not think that was the intent of this bill, but the way it is currently written could lead to embarrassing and unpredictable situations that could cause a lot of problems for law enforcement that the member for Don Valley West did not intend.

Honestly, if I examine the merits rather than the intent of this bill, I see that the bill as drafted is much too vague and imprecise. It tries to resolve a problem that arises only in very isolated and often similar situations—disputes among two, three or four individuals. These could be resolved amicably or through mediation, without such heavy-handed measures as a fine or prison sentence under the Criminal Code.

● (1420)

I would like to ask the member if he would withdraw the bill to try to improve it, as has been mentioned. Because opportunities to make amendments in committee are limited, it would be appreciated if he would withdraw the bill and improve it by taking into account the problems mentioned.

It is difficult to support the bill in its current form.

● (1425)

[English]

Mr. Dan Albas (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to rise today and express my support for Bill C-288, an act respecting the national flag of Canada. The bill would ensure that Canadians would not be prevented from proudly displaying our national flag.

In my riding of Okanagan—Coquihalla, we have many retired veterans. We have two veteran settlement communities that were created after the Second World War. To this very day, veterans still proudly call these communities home. Just last week, it was an honour to announce funding for a cenotaph in the veteran settlement community of West Bench. A former member of the House and mentor to me, Fred King, is a proud veteran who lives in the wartime settlement community of Kaleden.

However, many veterans have reached a point in time where they now live in a strata community, perhaps a condo, a townhouse or an apartment. Some of these veterans are prevented from flying the Canadian flag.

The Canadian flag has a unique history. It was through national debate and the participation of over 2,000 citizens who submitted designs that a new flag was finally chosen in 1964.

The Canadian flag is the legacy of inclusion. We should take note of this inheritance as we make a decision today. Did the parliamentarians at that time realize the overarching impact of their decision? I think they did. It is for this reason that such care was given to the selection.

The Canadian flag is an important symbol of our great nation, of its core values and natural history, a flag that all Canadians can proudly display. Yet some Canadians are prevented from doing so. I support the principle of this bill because I believe it is time to change that.

As Canadians, we have all stood tall on Canada Day and felt that immense sense of pride in the love of our country. We have felt it while singing the national anthem at a hockey game, while watching our triumphs at the Olympic games or overseas through the contributions made by our brave troops on behalf of all Canadians.

The Canadian flag is more than the material it is made from. It is a symbol to all of us that makes Canada a truly great country. It is a symbol of excellence, of inclusion, of tolerance, of making the world a better place. It is a reminder and one that I submit should not be denied.

Private Members' Business

The Canadian flag is the most visible and recognized symbol of Canada. When people come together, there is but one symbol to choose. The distinctive maple leaf has become a symbol of pride for Canadians from every walk of life and from every part of this nation. The flag inspires Canadians. Athletes, guides and scouts, school groups, service clubs such as the Rotary Club and Kiwanis, groups that serve their communities are inspired to contribute to their country, which is recognizable through the main symbol of the flag.

Above and beyond any other institutional affiliation, it is the flag that is used to unify people. Canadians feel close to the flag. They feel a sense of ownership. What place could be more important for its display than from their own homes?

For people to fly the flag in their place of residence is to make a statement about where they belong and what is important to them. The message of the flag is always one of unity and purpose of freedoms and acceptance. Canadians should be free to fly the flag, free to see it in every part of the country, from villages to cities, from tiny islands to the highest towers. The flying of the flag is a time-honoured tradition that binds Canadians to our shared past and is with us on each new challenge. It is important for Canadians to be able to continue to pass on the customs and practices of diverse regions and cultures that make this country great. The flying of the flag is a key part of the Canadian identity. It identifies us and brings us together.

I speak today on behalf of the flag. It has a distinguished history that has united Canadians for generations and will continue to do so for many years to come.

I believe that the bill does require some further fine tuning and agree with some of the comments made by my colleagues with respect to the penalties. I believe these concerns can and should be addressed at the committee stage.

I ask all members of the House to be mindful of this and to unite behind the flag.

May our Canadian flag always fly freely across this nation from the homes of any and all who wish to participate in what it means to be Canadian.

● (1430)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

[Translation]

Before adjourning, I would like to wish all members and staff of this chamber a good weekend. I hope they travel safely every weekend.

[English]

It being 2:31 p.m., this House stands adjourned until Monday at 11 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 2:31 p.m.)

APPENDIX

**ALPHABETICAL LIST OF MEMBERS WITH THEIR
CONSTITUENCIES, PROVINCE OF CONSTITUENCY
AND POLITICAL AFFILIATIONS;
COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE,
THE MINISTRY AND PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY**

CHAIR OCCUPANTS

The Speaker

HON. ANDREW SCHEER

The Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees of the Whole

MS. DENISE SAVOIE

The Deputy Chair of Committees of the Whole

MR. BARRY DEVOLIN

The Assistant Deputy Chair of Committees of the Whole

MR. BRUCE STANTON

BOARD OF INTERNAL ECONOMY

HON. ANDREW SCHEER

MS. CHRIS CHARLTON

MR. JOE COMARTIN

MS. JUDY FOOTE

HON. ROB MERRIFIELD

HON. GORDON O'CONNOR

HON. PETER VAN LOAN

ALPHABETICAL LIST OF MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

First Session—Forty-first Parliament

Name of Member	Constituency	Province of Constituency	Political Affiliation
Abлонczy, Hon. Diane, Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas and Consular Affairs).....	Calgary—Nose Hill.....	Alberta	CPC
Adams, Eve, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs.....	Mississauga—Brampton South	Ontario	CPC
Adler, Mark.....	York Centre	Ontario	CPC
Aglukkaq, Hon. Leona, Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency	Nunavut	Nunavut	CPC
Albas, Dan.....	Okanagan—Coquihalla	British Columbia	CPC
Albrecht, Harold	Kitchener—Conestoga.....	Ontario	CPC
Alexander, Chris, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence	Ajax—Pickering	Ontario	CPC
Allen, Malcolm.....	Welland	Ontario	NDP
Allen, Mike.....	Tobique—Mactaquac	New Brunswick.....	CPC
Allison, Dean.....	Niagara West—Glanbrook	Ontario	CPC
Ambler, Stella	Mississauga South	Ontario	CPC
Ambrose, Hon. Rona, Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women.....	Edmonton—Spruce Grove	Alberta	CPC
Anders, Rob	Calgary West	Alberta	CPC
Anderson, David, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board	Cypress Hills—Grasslands	Saskatchewan	CPC
Andrews, Scott		Newfoundland and Labrador.....	Lib.
Angus, Charlie	Timmins—James Bay	Ontario	NDP
Armstrong, Scott	Cumberland—Colchester— Musquodoboit Valley	Nova Scotia.....	CPC
Ashfield, Hon. Keith, Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway.....	Fredericton	New Brunswick.....	CPC
Ashton, Niki.....	Churchill	Manitoba	NDP
Aspin, Jay	Nipissing—Timiskaming	Ontario	CPC
Atamanenko, Alex	British Columbia Southern Interior	British Columbia	NDP
Aubin, Robert	Trois-Rivières	Québec	NDP
Ayala, Paulina	Honoré-Mercier	Québec	NDP
Baird, Hon. John, Minister of Foreign Affairs	Ottawa West—Nepean.....	Ontario	CPC
Bateman, Joyce.....	Winnipeg South Centre	Manitoba	CPC
Bélanger, Hon. Mauril	Ottawa—Vanier	Ontario	Lib.
Bellavance, André.....	Richmond—Arthabaska	Québec	BQ
Bennett, Hon. Carolyn	St. Paul's.....	Ontario	Lib.
Benoit, Leon.....	Vegreville—Wainwright	Alberta	CPC
Benskin, Tyrone.....	Jeanne-Le Ber	Québec	NDP
Bernier, Hon. Maxime, Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism)	Beauce	Québec	CPC
Bevington, Dennis	Western Arctic	Northwest Territories	NDP
Bezan, James	Selkirk—Interlake.....	Manitoba	CPC
Blanchette, Denis.....	Louis-Hébert	Québec	NDP
Blanchette-Lamothe, Lysane.....	Pierrefonds—Dollard	Québec	NDP
Blaney, Hon. Steven, Minister of Veterans Affairs	Lévis—Bellechasse	Québec	CPC
Block, Kelly	Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar	Saskatchewan	CPC

Name of Member	Constituency	Province of Constituency	Political Affiliation
Boivin, Françoise	Gatineau	Québec	NDP
Borg, Charmaine	Terrebonne—Blainville	Québec	NDP
Boughen, Ray	Palliser	Saskatchewan	CPC
Boulerice, Alexandre	Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie	Québec	NDP
Boutin-Sweet, Marjolaine	Hochelaga	Québec	NDP
Brahmi, Tarik	Saint-Jean	Québec	NDP
Braid, Peter	Kitchener—Waterloo	Ontario	CPC
Breitkreuz, Garry	Yorkton—Melville	Saskatchewan	CPC
Brisson, Hon. Scott	Kings—Hants	Nova Scotia	Lib.
Brosseau, Ruth Ellen	Berthier—Maskinongé	Québec	NDP
Brown, Gordon	Leeds—Grenville	Ontario	CPC
Brown, Lois, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation	Newmarket—Aurora	Ontario	CPC
Brown, Patrick	Barrie	Ontario	CPC
Bruinooog, Rod	Winnipeg South	Manitoba	CPC
Butt, Brad	Mississauga—Streetsville	Ontario	CPC
Byrne, Hon. Gerry	Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte	Newfoundland and Labrador	Lib.
Calandra, Paul, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage	Oak Ridges—Markham	Ontario	CPC
Calkins, Blaine	Wetaskiwin	Alberta	CPC
Cannan, Ron	Kelowna—Lake Country	British Columbia	CPC
Carmichael, John	Don Valley West	Ontario	CPC
Caron, Guy	Rimouski-Neigette— Témiscouata—Les Basques	Québec	NDP
Carrie, Colin, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health	Oshawa	Ontario	CPC
Casey, Sean	Charlottetown	Prince Edward Island	Lib.
Cash, Andrew	Davenport	Ontario	NDP
Charlton, Chris	Hamilton Mountain	Ontario	NDP
Chicoine, Sylvain	Châteauguay—Saint-Constant	Québec	NDP
Chisholm, Robert	Dartmouth—Cole Harbour	Nova Scotia	NDP
Chisu, Corneliu	Pickering—Scarborough East	Ontario	CPC
Chong, Hon. Michael	Wellington—Halton Hills	Ontario	CPC
Choquette, François	Drummond	Québec	NDP
Chow, Olivia	Trinity—Spadina	Ontario	NDP
Christopherson, David	Hamilton Centre	Ontario	NDP
Clarke, Rob	Desnethé—Missinippi— Churchill River	Saskatchewan	CPC
Cleary, Ryan	Newfoundland and St. John's South—Mount Pearl Labrador	Newfoundland and Labrador	NDP
Clement, Hon. Tony, President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario	Parry Sound—Muskoka	Ontario	CPC
Coderre, Hon. Denis	Bourassa	Québec	Lib.
Comartin, Joe	Windsor—Tecumseh	Ontario	NDP
Côté, Raymond	Beauport—Limouilou	Québec	NDP
Cotler, Hon. Irwin	Mount Royal	Québec	Lib.
Crowder, Jean	Nanaimo—Cowichan	British Columbia	NDP
Cullen, Nathan	Skeena—Bulkley Valley	British Columbia	NDP
Cuzner, Rodger	Cape Breton—Canso	Nova Scotia	Lib.
Daniel, Joe	Don Valley East	Ontario	CPC

Name of Member	Constituency	Province of Constituency	Political Affiliation
Davidson, Patricia	Sarnia—Lambton	Ontario	CPC
Davies, Don	Vancouver Kingsway	British Columbia	NDP
Davies, Libby	Vancouver East	British Columbia	NDP
Day, Anne-Marie	Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles	Québec	NDP
Dechert, Bob, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs	Mississauga—Erindale	Ontario	CPC
Del Mastro, Dean, Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs	Peterborough	Ontario	CPC
Devolin, Barry, The Acting Speaker	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	Ontario	CPC
Dewar, Paul	Ottawa Centre	Ontario	NDP
Dion, Hon. Stéphane, Saint-Laurent—Cartierville	Saint-Laurent—Cartierville	Québec	Lib.
Dionne Labelle, Pierre	Rivière-du-Nord	Québec	NDP
Donnelly, Fin	New Westminster—Coquitlam	British Columbia	NDP
Doré Lefebvre, Rosane	Alfred-Pellan	Québec	NDP
Dreesen, Earl	Red Deer	Alberta	CPC
Dubé, Matthew	Chambly—Borduas	Québec	NDP
Duncan, Hon. John, Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development	Vancouver Island North	British Columbia	CPC
Duncan, Kirsty	Etobicoke North	Ontario	Lib.
Duncan, Linda	Edmonton—Strathcona	Alberta	NDP
Dusseau, Pierre-Luc	Sherbrooke	Québec	NDP
Dykstra, Rick, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration	St. Catharines	Ontario	CPC
Easter, Hon. Wayne	Malpeque	Prince Edward Island	Lib.
Eyking, Hon. Mark	Sydney—Victoria	Nova Scotia	Lib.
Fantino, Hon. Julian, Associate Minister of National Defence	Vaughan	Ontario	CPC
Fast, Hon. Ed, Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway	Abbotsford	British Columbia	CPC
Findlay, Kerry-Lynne D., Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice	Delta—Richmond East	British Columbia	CPC
Finley, Hon. Diane, Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development	Haldimand—Norfolk	Ontario	CPC
Flaherty, Hon. Jim, Minister of Finance	Whitby—Oshawa	Ontario	CPC
Fletcher, Hon. Steven, Minister of State (Transport)	Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia	Manitoba	CPC
Foote, Judy	Random—Burin—St. George's	Newfoundland and Labrador	Lib.
Fortin, Jean-François	Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia	Québec	BQ
Freeman, Mylène	Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel	Québec	NDP
Fry, Hon. Hedy	Vancouver Centre	British Columbia	Lib.
Galipeau, Royal	Ottawa—Orléans	Ontario	CPC
Gallant, Cheryl	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	Ontario	CPC
Garneau, Marc	Westmount—Ville-Marie	Québec	Lib.
Garrison, Randall	Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca	British Columbia	NDP
Genest, Réjean	Shefford	Québec	NDP
Genest-Jourdain, Jonathan	Manicouagan	Québec	NDP
Giguère, Alain	Marc-Aurèle-Fortin	Québec	NDP

Name of Member	Constituency	Province of Constituency	Political Affiliation
Gill, Parm	Brampton—Springdale	Ontario	CPC
Glover, Shelly, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance	Saint Boniface	Manitoba	CPC
Godin, Yvon	Acadie—Bathurst	New Brunswick	NDP
Goguen, Robert, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice	Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe	New Brunswick	CPC
Golding, Peter	Edmonton East	Alberta	CPC
Goodale, Hon. Ralph	Wascana	Saskatchewan	Lib.
Goodyear, Hon. Gary, Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario)	Cambridge	Ontario	CPC
Gosal, Hon. Bal, Minister of State (Sport)	Bramalea—Gore—Malton	Ontario	CPC
Gourde, Jacques, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, for Official Languages and for the Economic Development Agency for the Regions of Quebec	Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la- Chaudière	Québec	CPC
Gravelle, Claude	Nickel Belt	Ontario	NDP
Grewal, Nina	Fleetwood—Port Kells	British Columbia	CPC
Groguhé, Sadia	Saint-Lambert	Québec	NDP
Harper, Right Hon. Stephen, Prime Minister	Calgary Southwest	Alberta	CPC
Harris, Dan	Scarborough Southwest	Ontario	NDP
Harris, Jack		Newfoundland and Labrador	NDP
Harris, Richard	St. John's East		NDP
Hassainia, Sana	Cariboo—Prince George	British Columbia	CPC
Hawn, Hon. Laurie	Verchères—Les Patriotes	Québec	NDP
Hayes, Bryan	Edmonton Centre	Alberta	CPC
Hiebert, Russ	Sault Ste. Marie	Ontario	CPC
	South Surrey—White Rock— Cloverdale	British Columbia	CPC
Hillyer, Jim	Lethbridge	Alberta	CPC
Hoback, Randy	Prince Albert	Saskatchewan	CPC
Hoepfner, Candice, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety	Portage—Lisgar	Manitoba	CPC
Holder, Ed	London West	Ontario	CPC
Hsu, Ted	Kingston and the Islands	Ontario	Lib.
Hughes, Carol	Algoma—Manitoulin— Kapuskasing	Ontario	NDP
Hyer, Bruce	Thunder Bay—Superior North	Ontario	NDP
Jacob, Pierre	Brome—Missisquoi	Québec	NDP
James, Roxanne	Scarborough Centre	Ontario	CPC
Jean, Brian	Fort McMurray—Athabasca	Alberta	CPC
Julian, Peter	Burnaby—New Westminster	British Columbia	NDP
Kamp, Randy, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and for the Asia-Pacific Gateway	Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge— Mission	British Columbia	CPC
Karygiannis, Hon. Jim	Scarborough—Agincourt	Ontario	Lib.
Keddy, Gerald, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Interna- tional Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway	South Shore—St. Margaret's	Nova Scotia	CPC
Kellway, Matthew	Beaches—East York	Ontario	NDP
Kenney, Hon. Jason, Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism	Calgary Southeast	Alberta	CPC
Kent, Hon. Peter, Minister of the Environment	Thornhill	Ontario	CPC
Kerr, Greg	West Nova	Nova Scotia	CPC
Komarnicki, Ed	Souris—Moose Mountain	Saskatchewan	CPC
Kramp, Daryl	Prince Edward—Hastings	Ontario	CPC

Name of Member	Constituency	Province of Constituency	Political Affiliation
Lake, Mike, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry ...	Edmonton—Mill Woods— Beaumont.....	Alberta	CPC
Lamoureux, Kevin	Winnipeg North	Manitoba	Lib.
Lapointe, François	Montmagny—L'Islet— Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup	Québec	NDP
Larose, Jean-François	Repentigny	Québec	NDP
Latendresse, Alexandrine	Louis-Saint-Laurent	Québec	NDP
Lauzon, Guy.....	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	Ontario	CPC
Laverdière, Hélène	Laurier—Sainte-Marie	Québec	NDP
Lebel, Hon. Denis, Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec	Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean.....	Québec	CPC
LeBlanc, Hon. Dominic	Beauséjour.....	New Brunswick.....	Lib.
LeBlanc, Hélène.....	LaSalle—Émard.....	Québec	NDP
Leef, Ryan	Yukon.....	Yukon	CPC
Leitch, Kellie, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour	Simcoe—Grey	Ontario	CPC
Lemieux, Pierre, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell .	Ontario	CPC
Leslie, Megan	Halifax	Nova Scotia.....	NDP
Leung, Chungsen, Parliamentary Secretary for Multiculturalism ...	Willowdale	Ontario	CPC
Liu, Laurin	Rivière-des-Mille-Îles.....	Québec	NDP
Lizon, Wladyslaw	Mississauga East—Cooksville .	Ontario	CPC
Lobb, Ben	Huron—Bruce.....	Ontario	CPC
Lukiwski, Tom, Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons	Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre	Saskatchewan	CPC
Lunney, James.....	Nanaimo—Alberni	British Columbia	CPC
MacAulay, Hon. Lawrence	Cardigan	Prince Edward Island....	Lib.
MacKay, Hon. Peter, Minister of National Defence	Central Nova	Nova Scotia.....	CPC
MacKenzie, Dave	Oxford	Ontario	CPC
Mai, Hoang	Brossard—La Prairie	Québec	NDP
Marston, Wayne	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek .	Ontario	NDP
Martin, Pat.....	Winnipeg Centre	Manitoba	NDP
Masse, Brian	Windsor West	Ontario	NDP
Mathyssen, Irene	London—Fanshawe.....	Ontario	NDP
May, Elizabeth	Saanich—Gulf Islands	British Columbia	GP
Mayes, Colin	Okanagan—Shuswap	British Columbia	CPC
McCallum, Hon. John	Markham—Unionville.....	Ontario	Lib.
McColeman, Phil.....	Brant	Ontario	CPC
McGuinty, David	Ottawa South	Ontario	Lib.
McKay, Hon. John	Scarborough—Guildwood.....	Ontario	Lib.
McLeod, Cathy, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue	Kamloops—Thompson— Cariboo	British Columbia	CPC
Menegakis, Costas	Richmond Hill	Ontario	CPC
Menzies, Hon. Ted, Minister of State (Finance)	Macleod	Alberta	CPC
Merrifield, Hon. Rob	Yellowhead	Alberta	CPC
Michaud, Élane	Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier.....	Québec	NDP
Miller, Larry	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound....	Ontario	CPC
Moore, Christine	Abitibi—Témiscamingue.....	Québec	NDP

Name of Member	Constituency	Province of Constituency	Political Affiliation
Moore, Hon. James, Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages.....	Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam	British Columbia	CPC
Moore, Hon. Rob	Fundy Royal	New Brunswick	CPC
Morin, Dany	Chicoutimi—Le Fjord	Québec	NDP
Morin, Isabelle	Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine	Québec	NDP
Morin, Marc-André	Laurentides—Labelle	Québec	NDP
Morin, Marie-Claude	Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot	Québec	NDP
Mourani, Maria	Ahuntsic	Québec	BQ
Mulcair, Thomas	Outremont	Québec	NDP
Murray, Joyce	Vancouver Quadra	British Columbia	Lib.
Nantel, Pierre	Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher	Québec	NDP
Nash, Peggy	Parkdale—High Park	Ontario	NDP
Nicholls, Jamie	Vaudreuil-Soulanges	Québec	NDP
Nicholson, Hon. Rob, Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada	Niagara Falls	Ontario	CPC
Norlock, Rick	Northumberland—Quinte West	Ontario	CPC
Nunez-Melo, José	Laval	Québec	NDP
O'Connor, Hon. Gordon, Minister of State and Chief Government Whip	Carleton—Mississippi Mills....	Ontario	CPC
O'Neill Gordon, Tilly	Miramichi	New Brunswick	CPC
Obhrai, Deepak, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs	Calgary East	Alberta	CPC
Oda, Hon. Bev, Minister of International Cooperation	Durham	Ontario	CPC
Oliver, Hon. Joe, Minister of Natural Resources	Eglinton—Lawrence	Ontario	CPC
Opitz, Ted	Etobicoke Centre	Ontario	CPC
Pacetti, Massimo	Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel ..	Québec	Lib.
Papillon, Annick	Québec	Québec	NDP
Paradis, Hon. Christian, Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture)	Mégantic—L'Érable	Québec	CPC
Patry, Claude	Jonquière—Alma	Québec	NDP
Payne, LaVar	Medicine Hat	Alberta	CPC
Pécelet, Ève	La Pointe-de-l'Île	Québec	NDP
Penashue, Hon. Peter, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada	Labrador	Newfoundland and Labrador	CPC
Perreault, Manon	Montcalm	Québec	NDP
Pilon, François	Laval—Les Îles	Québec	NDP
Plamondon, Louis	Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour	Québec	BQ
Poilievre, Pierre, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario	Nepean—Carleton	Ontario	CPC
Preston, Joe	Elgin—Middlesex—London	Ontario	CPC
Quach, Anne Minh-Thu	Beauharnois—Salaberry	Québec	NDP
Rae, Hon. Bob	Toronto Centre	Ontario	Lib.
Rafferty, John	Thunder Bay—Rainy River	Ontario	NDP
Raitt, Hon. Lisa, Minister of Labour	Halton	Ontario	CPC
Rajotte, James	Edmonton—Leduc	Alberta	CPC
Rathgeber, Brent	Edmonton—St. Albert	Alberta	CPC
Ravignat, Mathieu	Pontiac	Québec	NDP
Raynault, Francine	Joliette	Québec	NDP

Name of Member	Constituency	Province of Constituency	Political Affiliation
Regan, Hon. Geoff	Halifax West	Nova Scotia	Lib.
Reid, Scott	Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington	Ontario	CPC
Rempel, Michelle, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment	Calgary Centre-North	Alberta	CPC
Richards, Blake	Wild Rose	Alberta	CPC
Richardson, Lee	Calgary Centre	Alberta	CPC
Rickford, Greg, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario	Kenora	Ontario	CPC
Ritz, Hon. Gerry, Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board	Battlefords—Lloydminster	Saskatchewan	CPC
Rousseau, Jean	Compton—Stanstead	Québec	NDP
Saganash, Romeo	Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik —Eeyou	Québec	NDP
Sandhu, Jasbir	Surrey North	British Columbia	NDP
Savoie, Denise, The Deputy Speaker	Victoria	British Columbia	NDP
Saxton, Andrew, Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board and for Western Economic Diversification	North Vancouver	British Columbia	CPC
Scarpaleggia, Francis	Lac-Saint-Louis	Québec	Lib.
Scheer, Hon. Andrew, Speaker of the House of Commons	Regina—Qu'Appelle	Saskatchewan	CPC
Schellenberger, Gary	Perth—Wellington	Ontario	CPC
Seeback, Kyle	Brampton West	Ontario	CPC
Sellah, Djaouida	Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert	Québec	NDP
Sgro, Hon. Judy	York West	Ontario	Lib.
Shea, Hon. Gail, Minister of National Revenue	Egmont	Prince Edward Island	CPC
Shiple, Bev	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	Ontario	CPC
Shory, Devinder	Calgary Northeast	Alberta	CPC
Simms, Scott	Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor	Newfoundland and Labrador	Lib.
Sims, Jinny Jogindera	Newton—North Delta	British Columbia	NDP
Sitsabaiesan, Rathika	Scarborough—Rouge River	Ontario	NDP
Smith, Joy	Kildonan—St. Paul	Manitoba	CPC
Sopuck, Robert	Dauphin—Swan River— Marquette	Manitoba	CPC
Sorenson, Kevin	Crowfoot	Alberta	CPC
St-Denis, Lise	Saint-Maurice—Champlain	Québec	NDP
Stanton, Bruce, The Acting Speaker	Simcoe North	Ontario	CPC
Stewart, Kennedy	Burnaby—Douglas	British Columbia	NDP
Stoffer, Peter	Sackville—Eastern Shore	Nova Scotia	NDP
Storseth, Brian	Westlock—St. Paul	Alberta	CPC
Strahl, Mark	Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon	British Columbia	CPC
Sullivan, Mike	York South—Weston	Ontario	NDP
Sweet, David	Ancaster—Dundas— Flamborough—Westdale	Ontario	CPC
Thibeault, Glenn	Sudbury	Ontario	NDP
Tilson, David	Dufferin—Caledon	Ontario	CPC
Toet, Lawrence	Elmwood—Transcona	Manitoba	CPC
Toews, Hon. Vic, Minister of Public Safety	Provencher	Manitoba	CPC
Toone, Philip	Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine	Québec	NDP

Name of Member	Constituency	Province of Constituency	Political Affiliation
Tremblay, Jonathan	Montmorency—Charlevoix— Haute-Côte-Nord	Québec	NDP
Trost, Brad	Saskatoon—Humboldt	Saskatchewan	CPC
Trottier, Bernard	Etobicoke—Lakeshore	Ontario	CPC
Trudeau, Justin	Papineau	Québec	Lib.
Truppe, Susan, Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women	London North Centre	Ontario	CPC
Turmel, Nycole	Hull—Aylmer	Québec	NDP
Tweed, Merv	Brandon—Souris	Manitoba	CPC
Uppal, Hon. Tim, Minister of State (Democratic Reform)	Edmonton—Sherwood Park	Alberta	CPC
Valcourt, Hon. Bernard, Minister of State (Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency) (La Francophonie)	Madawaska—Restigouche	New Brunswick	CPC
Valeriote, Frank	Guelph	Ontario	Lib.
Van Kesteren, Dave	Chatham-Kent—Essex	Ontario	CPC
Van Loan, Hon. Peter, Leader of the Government in the House of Commons	York—Simcoe	Ontario	CPC
Vellacott, Maurice	Saskatoon—Wanuskewin	Saskatchewan	CPC
Wallace, Mike	Burlington	Ontario	CPC
Warawa, Mark	Langley	British Columbia	CPC
Warkentin, Chris	Peace River	Alberta	CPC
Watson, Jeff	Essex	Ontario	CPC
Weston, John	West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country	British Columbia	CPC
Weston, Rodney	Saint John	New Brunswick	CPC
Wilks, David	Kootenay—Columbia	British Columbia	CPC
Williamson, John	New Brunswick Southwest	New Brunswick	CPC
Wong, Hon. Alice, Minister of State (Seniors)	Richmond	British Columbia	CPC
Woodworth, Stephen	Kitchener Centre	Ontario	CPC
Yelich, Hon. Lynne, Minister of State (Western Economic Diversi- fication)	Blackstrap	Saskatchewan	CPC
Young, Terence	Oakville	Ontario	CPC
Young, Wai	Vancouver South	British Columbia	CPC
Zimmer, Bob	Prince George—Peace River	British Columbia	CPC
VACANCY	Toronto—Danforth	Ontario	

ALPHABETICAL LIST OF MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS BY PROVINCE

First Session—Forty-first Parliament

Name of Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALBERTA (28)		
Ablonczy, Hon. Diane, Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas and Consular Affairs)	Calgary—Nose Hill	CPC
Ambrose, Hon. Rona, Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women	Edmonton—Spruce Grove	CPC
Anders, Rob	Calgary West	CPC
Benoit, Leon	Vegreville—Wainwright	CPC
Calkins, Blaine	Wetaskiwin	CPC
Dreeshen, Earl	Red Deer	CPC
Duncan, Linda	Edmonton—Strathcona	NDP
Goldring, Peter	Edmonton East	CPC
Harper, Right Hon. Stephen, Prime Minister	Calgary Southwest	CPC
Hawn, Hon. Laurie	Edmonton Centre	CPC
Hillyer, Jim	Lethbridge	CPC
Jean, Brian	Fort McMurray—Athabasca	CPC
Kenney, Hon. Jason, Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism	Calgary Southeast	CPC
Lake, Mike, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry	Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont	CPC
Menzies, Hon. Ted, Minister of State (Finance)	Macleod	CPC
Merrifield, Hon. Rob	Yellowhead	CPC
Obhrai, Deepak, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs	Calgary East	CPC
Payne, LaVar	Medicine Hat	CPC
Rajotte, James	Edmonton—Leduc	CPC
Rathgeber, Brent	Edmonton—St. Albert	CPC
Rempel, Michelle, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment	Calgary Centre-North	CPC
Richards, Blake	Wild Rose	CPC
Richardson, Lee	Calgary Centre	CPC
Shory, Devinder	Calgary Northeast	CPC
Sorenson, Kevin	Crowfoot	CPC
Storseth, Brian	Westlock—St. Paul	CPC
Uppal, Hon. Tim, Minister of State (Democratic Reform)	Edmonton—Sherwood Park	CPC
Warkentin, Chris	Peace River	CPC
BRITISH COLUMBIA (36)		
Albas, Dan	Okanagan—Coquihalla	CPC
Atamanenko, Alex	British Columbia Southern Interior	NDP
Cannan, Ron	Kelowna—Lake Country	CPC
Crowder, Jean	Nanaimo—Cowichan	NDP
Cullen, Nathan	Skeena—Bulkley Valley	NDP
Davies, Don	Vancouver Kingsway	NDP
Davies, Libby	Vancouver East	NDP
Donnelly, Fin	New Westminster—Coquitlam	NDP
Duncan, Hon. John, Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development	Vancouver Island North	CPC
Fast, Hon. Ed, Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway	Abbotsford	CPC
Findlay, Kerry-Lynne D., Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice	Delta—Richmond East	CPC

Name of Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
Fry, Hon. Hedy	Vancouver Centre	Lib.
Garrison, Randall	Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca	NDP
Grewal, Nina	Fleetwood—Port Kells	CPC
Harris, Richard	Cariboo—Prince George	CPC
Hiebert, Russ	South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale	CPC
Julian, Peter	Burnaby—New Westminster	NDP
Kamp, Randy, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and for the Asia-Pacific Gateway	Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission	CPC
Lunney, James	Nanaimo—Alberni	CPC
May, Elizabeth	Saanich—Gulf Islands	GP
Mayes, Colin	Okanagan—Shuswap	CPC
McLeod, Cathy, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue	Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo	CPC
Moore, Hon. James, Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages	Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam	CPC
Murray, Joyce	Vancouver Quadra	Lib.
Sandhu, Jasbir	Surrey North	NDP
Savoie, Denise, The Deputy Speaker	Victoria	NDP
Saxton, Andrew, Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board and for Western Economic Diversification	North Vancouver	CPC
Sims, Jinny Jogindera	Newton—North Delta	NDP
Stewart, Kennedy	Burnaby—Douglas	NDP
Strahl, Mark	Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon	CPC
Warawa, Mark	Langley	CPC
Weston, John	West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country	CPC
Wilks, David	Kootenay—Columbia	CPC
Wong, Hon. Alice, Minister of State (Seniors)	Richmond	CPC
Young, Wai	Vancouver South	CPC
Zimmer, Bob	Prince George—Peace River	CPC

MANITOBA (14)

Ashton, Niki	Churchill	NDP
Bateman, Joyce	Winnipeg South Centre	CPC
Bezan, James	Selkirk—Interlake	CPC
Bruinooge, Rod	Winnipeg South	CPC
Fletcher, Hon. Steven, Minister of State (Transport)	Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia	CPC
Glover, Shelly, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance	Saint Boniface	CPC
Hoepfner, Candice, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety	Portage—Lisgar	CPC
Lamoureux, Kevin	Winnipeg North	Lib.
Martin, Pat	Winnipeg Centre	NDP
Smith, Joy	Kildonan—St. Paul	CPC
Sopuck, Robert	Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette	CPC
Toet, Lawrence	Elmwood—Transcona	CPC
Toews, Hon. Vic, Minister of Public Safety	Provencher	CPC
Tweed, Merv	Brandon—Souris	CPC

NEW BRUNSWICK (10)

Allen, Mike	Tobique—Mactaquac	CPC
Ashfield, Hon. Keith, Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway	Fredericton	CPC

Name of Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
Godin, Yvon	Acadie—Bathurst	NDP
Goguen, Robert, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice	Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe	CPC
LeBlanc, Hon. Dominic	Beauséjour	Lib.
Moore, Hon. Rob	Fundy Royal	CPC
O'Neill Gordon, Tilly	Miramichi	CPC
Valcourt, Hon. Bernard, Minister of State (Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency) (La Francophonie)	Madawaska—Restigouche	CPC
Weston, Rodney	Saint John	CPC
Williamson, John	New Brunswick Southwest	CPC

NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR (7)

Andrews, Scott	Avalon	Lib.
Byrne, Hon. Gerry	Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte	Lib.
Cleary, Ryan	St. John's South—Mount Pearl	NDP
Foote, Judy	Random—Burin—St. George's	Lib.
Harris, Jack	St. John's East	NDP
Penashue, Hon. Peter, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada	Labrador	CPC
Simms, Scott	Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor	Lib.

NORTHWEST TERRITORIES (1)

Bevington, Dennis	Western Arctic	NDP
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NOVA SCOTIA (11)

Armstrong, Scott	Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley	CPC
Brisson, Hon. Scott	Kings—Hants	Lib.
Chisholm, Robert	Dartmouth—Cole Harbour	NDP
Cuzner, Rodger	Cape Breton—Canso	Lib.
Eyking, Hon. Mark	Sydney—Victoria	Lib.
Keddy, Gerald, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway	South Shore—St. Margaret's	CPC
Kerr, Greg	West Nova	CPC
Leslie, Megan	Halifax	NDP
MacKay, Hon. Peter, Minister of National Defence	Central Nova	CPC
Regan, Hon. Geoff	Halifax West	Lib.
Stoffer, Peter	Sackville—Eastern Shore	NDP

NUNAVUT (1)

Aglukkaq, Hon. Leona, Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency	Nunavut	CPC
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ONTARIO (105)

Adams, Eve, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs	Mississauga—Brampton South	CPC
Adler, Mark	York Centre	CPC
Albrecht, Harold	Kitchener—Conestoga	CPC
Alexander, Chris, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence	Ajax—Pickering	CPC
Allen, Malcolm	Welland	NDP

Name of Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
Allison, Dean	Niagara West—Glanbrook	CPC
Ambler, Stella	Mississauga South	CPC
Angus, Charlie	Timmins—James Bay	NDP
Aspin, Jay	Nipissing—Timiskaming	CPC
Baird, Hon. John, Minister of Foreign Affairs	Ottawa West—Nepean	CPC
Bélanger, Hon. Mauril	Ottawa—Vanier	Lib.
Bennett, Hon. Carolyn	St. Paul's	Lib.
Braid, Peter	Kitchener—Waterloo	CPC
Brown, Gordon	Leeds—Grenville	CPC
Brown, Lois, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation	Newmarket—Aurora	CPC
Brown, Patrick	Barrie	CPC
Butt, Brad	Mississauga—Streetsville	CPC
Calandra, Paul, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage	Oak Ridges—Markham	CPC
Carmichael, John	Don Valley West	CPC
Carrie, Colin, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health	Oshawa	CPC
Cash, Andrew	Davenport	NDP
Charlton, Chris	Hamilton Mountain	NDP
Chisu, Corneliu	Pickering—Scarborough East	CPC
Chong, Hon. Michael	Wellington—Halton Hills	CPC
Chow, Olivia	Trinity—Spadina	NDP
Christopherson, David	Hamilton Centre	NDP
Clement, Hon. Tony, President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario	Parry Sound—Muskoka	CPC
Comartin, Joe	Windsor—Tecumseh	NDP
Daniel, Joe	Don Valley East	CPC
Davidson, Patricia	Sarnia—Lambton	CPC
Dechert, Bob, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs	Mississauga—Erindale	CPC
Del Mastro, Dean, Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs	Peterborough	CPC
Devolin, Barry, The Acting Speaker	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	CPC
Dewar, Paul	Ottawa Centre	NDP
Duncan, Kirsty	Etobicoke North	Lib.
Dykstra, Rick, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration	St. Catharines	CPC
Fantino, Hon. Julian, Associate Minister of National Defence	Vaughan	CPC
Finley, Hon. Diane, Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development	Haldimand—Norfolk	CPC
Flaherty, Hon. Jim, Minister of Finance	Whitby—Oshawa	CPC
Galipeau, Royal	Ottawa—Orléans	CPC
Gallant, Cheryl	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	CPC
Gill, Parm	Brampton—Springdale	CPC
Goodyear, Hon. Gary, Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario)	Cambridge	CPC
Gosal, Hon. Bal, Minister of State (Sport)	Bramalea—Gore—Malton	CPC
Gravelle, Claude	Nickel Belt	NDP
Harris, Dan	Scarborough Southwest	NDP
Hayes, Bryan	Sault Ste. Marie	CPC
Holder, Ed.	London West	CPC
Hsu, Ted	Kingston and the Islands	Lib.
Hughes, Carol	Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing	NDP
Hyer, Bruce	Thunder Bay—Superior North	NDP

Name of Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
James, Roxanne	Scarborough Centre	CPC
Karygiannis, Hon. Jim	Scarborough—Agincourt	Lib.
Kellway, Matthew	Beaches—East York	NDP
Kent, Hon. Peter, Minister of the Environment	Thornhill	CPC
Kramp, Daryl	Prince Edward—Hastings	CPC
Lauzon, Guy	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	CPC
Leitch, Kellie, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour	Simcoe—Grey	CPC
Lemieux, Pierre, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	CPC
Leung, Chungsen, Parliamentary Secretary for Multiculturalism	Willowdale	CPC
Lizon, Wladyslaw	Mississauga East—Cooksville	CPC
Lobb, Ben	Huron—Bruce	CPC
MacKenzie, Dave	Oxford	CPC
Marston, Wayne	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek	NDP
Masse, Brian	Windsor West	NDP
Mathysen, Irene	London—Fanshawe	NDP
McCallum, Hon. John	Markham—Unionville	Lib.
McColeman, Phil	Brant	CPC
McGuinty, David	Ottawa South	Lib.
McKay, Hon. John	Scarborough—Guildwood	Lib.
Menegakis, Costas	Richmond Hill	CPC
Miller, Larry	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	CPC
Nash, Peggy	Parkdale—High Park	NDP
Nicholson, Hon. Rob, Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada	Niagara Falls	CPC
Norlock, Rick	Northumberland—Quinte West	CPC
O'Connor, Hon. Gordon, Minister of State and Chief Government Whip	Carleton—Mississippi Mills	CPC
Oda, Hon. Bev, Minister of International Cooperation	Durham	CPC
Oliver, Hon. Joe, Minister of Natural Resources	Eglinton—Lawrence	CPC
Opitz, Ted	Etobicoke Centre	CPC
Poilievre, Pierre, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario	Nepean—Carleton	CPC
Preston, Joe	Elgin—Middlesex—London	CPC
Rae, Hon. Bob	Toronto Centre	Lib.
Rafferty, John	Thunder Bay—Rainy River	NDP
Raitt, Hon. Lisa, Minister of Labour	Halton	CPC
Reid, Scott	Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington	CPC
Rickford, Greg, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario	Kenora	CPC
Schellenberger, Gary	Perth—Wellington	CPC
Seebach, Kyle	Brampton West	CPC
Sgro, Hon. Judy	York West	Lib.
Shiple, Bev	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	CPC
Sitsabaiesan, Rathika	Scarborough—Rouge River	NDP
Stanton, Bruce, The Acting Speaker	Simcoe North	CPC
Sullivan, Mike	York South—Weston	NDP
Sweet, David	Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale	CPC
Thibeault, Glenn	Sudbury	NDP

Name of Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
Tilson, David	Dufferin—Caledon	CPC
Trottier, Bernard	Etobicoke—Lakeshore	CPC
Truppe, Susan, Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women	London North Centre	CPC
Valeriote, Frank	Guelph	Lib.
Van Kesteren, Dave	Chatham-Kent—Essex	CPC
Van Loan, Hon. Peter, Leader of the Government in the House of Commons	York—Simcoe	CPC
Wallace, Mike	Burlington	CPC
Watson, Jeff	Essex	CPC
Woodworth, Stephen	Kitchener Centre	CPC
Young, Terence	Oakville	CPC
VACANCY	Toronto—Danforth	

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND (4)

Casey, Sean	Charlottetown	Lib.
Easter, Hon. Wayne	Malpeque	Lib.
MacAulay, Hon. Lawrence	Cardigan	Lib.
Shea, Hon. Gail, Minister of National Revenue	Egmont	CPC

QUÉBEC (75)

Aubin, Robert	Trois-Rivières	NDP
Ayala, Paulina	Honoré-Mercier	NDP
Bellavance, André	Richmond—Arthabaska	BQ
Benskin, Tyrone	Jeanne-Le Ber	NDP
Bernier, Hon. Maxime, Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism)	Beauce	CPC
Blanchette, Denis	Louis-Hébert	NDP
Blanchette-Lamothe, Lysane	Pierrefonds—Dollard	NDP
Blaney, Hon. Steven, Minister of Veterans Affairs	Lévis—Bellechasse	CPC
Boivin, Françoise	Gatineau	NDP
Borg, Charmaine	Terrebonne—Blainville	NDP
Boulerice, Alexandre	Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie	NDP
Boutin-Sweet, Marjolaine	Hochelaga	NDP
Brahmi, Tarik	Saint-Jean	NDP
Brosseau, Ruth Ellen	Berthier—Maskinongé	NDP
Caron, Guy	Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques	NDP
Chicoine, Sylvain	Châteauguay—Saint-Constant	NDP
Choquette, François	Drummond	NDP
Coderre, Hon. Denis	Bourassa	Lib.
Côté, Raymond	Beauport—Limoilou	NDP
Cotler, Hon. Irwin	Mount Royal	Lib.
Day, Anne-Marie	Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles	NDP
Dion, Hon. Stéphane, Saint-Laurent—Cartierville	Saint-Laurent—Cartierville	Lib.
Dionne Labelle, Pierre	Rivière-du-Nord	NDP
Doré Lefebvre, Rosane	Alfred-Pellan	NDP
Dubé, Matthew	Chambly—Borduas	NDP
Dusseault, Pierre-Luc	Sherbrooke	NDP
Fortin, Jean-François	Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia	BQ
Freeman, Mylène	Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel	NDP

Name of Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
Gameau, Marc	Westmount—Ville-Marie	Lib.
Genest, Réjean	Shefford	NDP
Genest-Jourdain, Jonathan	Manicouagan	NDP
Giguère, Alain	Marc-Aurèle-Fortin	NDP
Gourde, Jacques, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, for Official Languages and for the Economic Development Agency for the Regions of Quebec	Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière	CPC
Groguhé, Sadia	Saint-Lambert	NDP
Hassainia, Sana	Verchères—Les Patriotes	NDP
Jacob, Pierre	Brome—Missisquoi	NDP
Lapointe, François	Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup	NDP
Larose, Jean-François	Repentigny	NDP
Latendresse, Alexandrine	Louis-Saint-Laurent	NDP
Laverdière, Hélène	Laurier—Sainte-Marie	NDP
Lebel, Hon. Denis, Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec	Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean	CPC
LeBlanc, Hélène	LaSalle—Émard	NDP
Liu, Laurin	Rivière-des-Mille-Îles	NDP
Mai, Hoang	Brossard—La Prairie	NDP
Michaud, Élane	Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier	NDP
Moore, Christine	Abitibi—Témiscamingue	NDP
Morin, Dany	Chicoutimi—Le Fjord	NDP
Morin, Isabelle	Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine	NDP
Morin, Marc-André	Laurentides—Labelle	NDP
Morin, Marie-Claude	Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot	NDP
Mourani, Maria	Ahuntsic	BQ
Mulcair, Thomas	Outremont	NDP
Nantel, Pierre	Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher	NDP
Nicholls, Jamie	Vaudreuil-Soulanges	NDP
Nunez-Melo, José	Laval	NDP
Pacetti, Massimo	Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel	Lib.
Papillon, Annick	Québec	NDP
Paradis, Hon. Christian, Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture)	Mégantic—L'Érable	CPC
Patry, Claude	Jonguère—Alma	NDP
Pécelet, Ève	La Pointe-de-l'Île	NDP
Perreault, Manon	Montcalm	NDP
Pilon, François	Laval—Les Îles	NDP
Plamondon, Louis	Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour	BQ
Quach, Anne Minh-Thu	Beauharnois—Salaberry	NDP
Ravignat, Mathieu	Pontiac	NDP
Raynault, Francine	Joliette	NDP
Rousseau, Jean	Compton—Stanstead	NDP
Saganash, Romeo	Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou	NDP
Scarpaleggia, Francis	Lac-Saint-Louis	Lib.
Sellah, Djaouda	Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert	NDP
St-Denis, Lise	Saint-Maurice—Champlain	NDP
Toone, Philip	Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine	NDP
Tremblay, Jonathan	Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord	NDP

Name of Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
Trudeau, Justin.....	Papineau	Lib.
Turmel, Nicole	Hull—Aylmer	NDP

SASKATCHEWAN (14)

Anderson, David, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board	Cypress Hills—Grasslands	CPC
Block, Kelly	Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar	CPC
Boughen, Ray	Palliser	CPC
Breitkreuz, Garry	Yorkton—Melville	CPC
Clarke, Rob	Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River	CPC
Goodale, Hon. Ralph	Wascana	Lib.
Hoback, Randy	Prince Albert	CPC
Komarnicki, Ed	Souris—Moose Mountain	CPC
Lukiwski, Tom, Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons	Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre	CPC
Ritz, Hon. Gerry, Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board	Battlefords—Lloydminster	CPC
Scheer, Hon. Andrew, Speaker of the House of Commons	Regina—Qu'Appelle	CPC
Trost, Brad	Saskatoon—Humboldt	CPC
Vellacott, Maurice	Saskatoon—Wanuskewin	CPC
Yelich, Hon. Lynne, Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification)	Blackstrap	CPC

YUKON (1)

Leef, Ryan	Yukon	CPC
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(As of November 18, 2011 — 1st Session, 41st Parliament)

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Ray Boughen
Rob Clarke
Linda Duncan

Jonathan Genest-Jourdain
Carol Hughes

LaVar Payne
Greg Rickford

Kyle Seeback
David Wilks

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Garry Breitkreuz
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Patrick Brown
Rod Bruinooge
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Pierre Lemieux
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Bob Zimmer

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Earl DreeshenPierre-Luc Dusseault
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AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

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Chris Alexander	Dean Del Mastro	Guy Lauzon	Bev Shipley
Mike Allen	Earl Dreeshen	Ryan Leaf	Devinder Shory
Dean Allison	Rick Dykstra	Kellie Leitch	Joy Smith
Stella Ambler	Wayne Easter	Chungsen Leung	Robert Sopuck
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Ron Cannan	Ed Holder	Brent Rathgeber	John Williamson
John Carmichael	Roxanne James	Scott Reid	Stephen Woodworth
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Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet				

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Mike Allen	Rick Dykstra	Pierre Lemieux	Joy Smith
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Garry Breitzkreuz	Russ Hiebert	Tilly O'Neill Gordon	Maurice Vellacott
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Corneliu Chisu	Jim Karygiannis	Michelle Rempel	Stephen Woodworth
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Joe Daniel	Ed Komarnicki	Greg Rickford	

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Roxanne James

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Chungsen Leung

Costas Menegakis
Ted Opitz

Rathika Sitsabaiesan
John Weston

(12)

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Michael Chong

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Gerald Keddy
Greg Kerr

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Chris Alexander	Dean Del Mastro	Ryan Leef	Gary Schellenberger
Mike Allen	Stéphane Dion	Kellie Leitch	Kyle Seeback
Dean Allison	Earl Dreeshen	Pierre Lemieux	Bev Shipley
Rob Anders	Linda Duncan	Chungsen Leung	Devinder Shory
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Scott Armstrong	Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay	Ben Lobb	Joy Smith
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Peter Goldring				

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Chris Alexander
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Mr. David Anderson	to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board

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